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SERMONS BY THE REV.

JOSEPH PARKER, D.D.

VOLUME V.

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These sermons have been printed from the reporter's notes. Probably not a sentence was written beforehand. This will account for irregularity and roughness, and apparent want of punctuation, in the style. Those who heard the discourses will be able to read them according to the preacher's intention.

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Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are gathered around the birthplace in Bethlehem. There is born unto us this day and every day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Oh that we may be able by faith and thanksgiving to hail every day as the birthday of Jesus Christ! He is the Life of the world and the Light thereof; He is our one Saviour, and there is none other; ours is an undivided anthem, the ascription of praise is Christ's alone. We thank Thee for these bright days of history, days wherein great men were born, each a saviour in his own way and a redeemer; we bless Thee most for the day which saw the Babe of Bethlehem; He is King of kings, He is Lord of lords; His throne swallows up all other thrones, and in His glory all other light is lost. We are the professed followers of Jesus Christ, we have been baptised into His name, we have heard of His Cross, and our hearts have received the doctrine thereof and the great comfort and the eternal hope. What manner of men ought we therefore to be? We are in the family of God by adoption; all we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, but we have now, by Thy grace and love shown in Christ Jesus, returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Thou hast opened the door of the fold and received us every one; we therefore cannot be silent in Thy courts, we must lift up our voice with the shout of praise, and with the cry of those who have received tokens of a great triumph. We bless Thee for all sweet gospel words. The world is so cold, so bitter, it has no resting-place for us, there is no room for us in its crowded inn. May Christ be born in us the hope of glory, may our hearts be the cradle of the Lord, may we have no king but Jesus, may we do mighty things in His mighty name. We would be filled with the spirit of joy, of Christmas joy, Christ's own joy, the festival of the Son of God; we would be glad with a wise gladness, and not with a fool's merriment; our hearts would glow with love, the kind of love that sings its song in the spirit of joy; and if men ask us, Why these anthems and utterances of praise? we would say, Christ the Lord is born to-day, and we have gathered around the Babe Christ that we may be babes in His babehood. Blessed are all the little ones, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. May we have the child-heart, may we love with simplicity and tenderness and all trust, may we lean upon the love of God, may we abide in the tabernacle of His promises and His decrees, may we be no longer wanderers on the face of the earth, tossed to and fro

with every wind of doctrine, but may we rest in the Cross, in the sacrificial offering, in the all-sufficient Atonement, having no will of our own, no pride, no ambition, but simply to know and love the Christ; may that be the purpose and the crying desire of our hearts. May all families be glad, may the house-door stand wide open in token of hospitality; may our tables need great lengthening to-day, because of the portions we send to them that are ready to faint; and may the spirit of Christ rule us, may this day be the grave day of all unkindness, uncharitableness, selfishness; and if any man have a quarrel against any, may he bury it to-day and know not the place of its entombment. And if any are cold-hearted, warm them with Pentecostal heat. Bring us by the power of the Cross, a sweet and eternal pathos, into the reconciliation of love, into mutual honour and faithfulness, because we are the followers of one King. The Lord have us in His holy keeping, and make every day Christmas Day, because Christ is the light of its morning and the sun of its noontide. Amen.

CXXI.

WORSHIPPING CHRIST.

"*We . . . are come to worship Him.*"—MATT. ii. 2.

WANT all the children and young folks to know exactly what worship means. Long ago it was spelled in another way; in Anglo-Saxon it was spelt worthship. Then the text would read, "We have come to worthship Him," to acknowledge His worth, His value, His excellence—gold more than golden, something so priceful as to be priceless. The men referred to in the text said, We have come to pay Him worthship, to acknowledge Him as King, as the greatest in all the world; let us see Him, we will throw presents before His cradle in sign of our homage and loyalty; we have come a long way; we know not what else could have brought us here to-day but the leading of that kindly, brightest of stars; and now that we are here the explanation is that we have come to bow down and offer homage and pay the tribute of our adoration. Then the word fell to pieces. Shall we be far wrong if we say that most words

have so fallen? How is the fine gold become dim!—the fine gold of speech, the words that used to be jewels and are now debased and are like a coinage no longer acknowledged by the throne. Worship then became a term significant of cravenness, abjectness, servility, a crouching at the feet of those who might be tempted by the price of our homage to give us something in return. Then worship became a merely official term. A man who was, comparatively speaking, nothing yesterday may become "his worship" to-day: a ceremony has taken place, an appointment has been filled, something has been done that is merely nominal. The word "Worshipful," therefore, may mean simply nothing so far as the personal character of the man is concerned—like the word "Honourable," "Right Honourable," and "Most Honourable." These may be debasements and perversions of words which were once rich in really valuable meaning and significance. We have come to-day, let us hope, with the right kind of worship, with hearts full of adoring gratitude, prostrate yet exultant love. Then shall our worship be acceptable.

Jesus Christ Himself did not often use the word worship, but He did once use it with striking and continual effect. "The Father seeketh such to worship Him." What is the meaning of "such" in that relation? It indicates people who worship God in spirit and in truth, people whose hearts are altars, whose lives are tabernacles which the Lord hath chosen as His abiding places. They offer acceptable worship, whatever it be, how poor soever, who really mean it. What a revolution that thought would create in the whole missionary world! I would destroy no man's idol in contempt or in anger, I should let him keep his idol, yet all the while I should be so speaking to him and so treating him that his grasp would relax and his idol fall away and his eyes be turned into the great heights where the sun is and where the stars burn, if haply they may some day see Him who cannot be seen. Tear away a man's idol from his hand, and he will return to it when your back is turned upon him; take his idol away by force, and he will sigh for it, and deeply and yearningly long for it, and if he can possibly recover it he will do

so. But speak to the man so gently, softly, illuminatingly, that he will begin to feel that all things are mysterious, and that the greatest mystery is love and the greatest love is atonement; and he himself will leave the idol and go after the true God. That is conversion; not conversion by compulsion or by restraint or ways of any kind except the most spiritual. When the man's heart is turned to the living God all the idols made by his own hands will be dropped and forgotten in darkness. The contempt which is poured upon them must come from the idolator himself, and not from the missionary who tries to convert him. This is a great mystery, this is spiritual education, this doctrine applies to the whole line of spiritual education. It applies to habits, customs, old ways of doing things. Do not wrangle with the man about a habit here and there; strike deeper, get at the root of things. Treat the heart wisely, after the manner of the Spirit of God, and the habits will all come right in due time. There may be a correction of habit which is unreprovable, and is indeed almost necessary in elementary education, but looking at the whole subject of habitude philosophically and religiously, we shall never get the habits right until the heart is right. When the heart is soft towards God, then every word from heaven will make a mark upon it, and the man will be only too glad to disown his self of yesterday, and covet the better down-coming, heaven-sent self of to-morrow.

We know what it is to worship. Let us for the moment drop the word worship, regarding it as having become too narrowly a church word that has upon it a kind of religious symbol. The spirit of worship is in us all. It may not be directed to the right end, but the spirit or instinct of worship is in us, though, mayhap, we may be atheists. Instead of saying "worship" let us say *homage*. We do not necessarily secularise the word by so substituting it. We pay homage—to what? Some men pay homage to genius. They could not sit, and leave genius standing; this would express not obedience to a mere code of honour or convention, it would express the real instinct of inborn worshipfulness and gentlemanliness. There are men who, on entering the House of Peers, were

such entrance possible to them, would by their very entrance lift the peers to their feet, that they might stand and pay at least some silent homage to commanding, real genius. We do not always recognise the fact that such homage is in its own way worship, and perhaps in its own way religious worship. We do many things that we do not intend to do under merely religious forms. If some persons were to be, so to say, accused or charged with being praying men, they would resent the insinuation or the declaration. They would say, "We pray? we never pray." That is the voice of folly. All men pray. Quite as surely as all men breathe, all men pray; not in the Christian sense, not under church definitions, but the sigh, the outgoing of the heart, the sweet wish, the great yearning, the silence to which pain is reduced in its misery, so that it must write its desire in the very expression of its eyes; that is prayer. Sometimes we worship capacity in the sense of paying homage to it. We say that this is the man. Why is he the man? Because he can do this work. Are there not any other men that can do it? No, there is not a single man known to us who can do it so well, with such faculty, with such masterliness, with such right of authority. So, therefore, we make way for him and let him come to the place of primacy. He was sent to it from the eternities. Can we not hinder him a little? Yes, we can hinder him a little. Can we not permanently hinder him? No; the Lord's election standeth sure; His designations come to fruition, to coronation, and come to a point which gives the Almighty Himself satisfaction, so that He says from His heavens, "It is very good." Sometimes we pay homage to character. The man has no commanding ability, the man may have been trained under very discouraging and stunting circumstances, but we say, How true he is, how faithful! we need no writing as between him and us; if the compact were between him and ourselves we should need no signature—it is only because death may supervene or others will be interested in the matter; if the matter were without complication, this man's word would be enough; to ask him to use pen and ink would be a kind of covert insult to his integrity. Hats off! Why? Because there is a great man before you, an honest,

upright, honourable man, a man in whom is the spirit of trusteeship and stewardship and high responsibility. He is not brilliant. Perhaps not, intellectually, but he is morally a brilliant man; he is one of the lights of the world, he is one of the cities that cannot be hid; he is one of the pillars on whose integrity the world seems partially to rest. Let us therefore pay tribute to the man. We do not worship him in any religious sense, but we thank God for him, and so long as he is accessible and his influence is alive, the avenging flame may not be allowed to descend from the thunder-clouds.

We advance a step, and come to the idea of deliverance, redemption, answered expectancy. We live in expectation. There are those who would not use the word prayerful hope, and yet they are living in expectation of a coming Christmas, they have a Messiah of their own; they say, The right man has not yet come, but he is coming, and he will come; for we have seen his star, and we have heard voices of silence, the sublimest eloquence, the spiritual grandeur of speech. All men live in expectation of their own Christmas. They may cast out the dear Son of God, the Babe of Bethlehem, they may deride Him, but they have a cradle of their own, a Bethlehem Ephrata out of which is to come the delivering soul, the mighty man whose garments are red as with the blood of victory. It is a political messiah or a commercial or some kind of intellectual messiah, it is a great Humanity or a splendid ideal. What talk is that? It is Christian speech, turned from the directly Christian line, yet full unknowingly of Christian meaning. Man must have a Christmas, a born Christ, a Babe, a Root, a Branch, a germ out of which will come the whole kingdom of reconciliation and righteousness and final peace.

We find our Christ in Bethlehem. We believe that He will make the whole world right. He claims time in which to carry out His great ministry. He comes in the flesh; He vanishes from the body that He may send the true Paraclete, the abiding Spirit, the true inward Personality—the personality that is a Trinity in itself. He will convict the world of sin, of righteous-

ness, and of judgment to come—that other trinity that rules from a throne unseen.

When we forget these great advents, these most solemn and impressive epiphanies, we are left to our poor selves, and there is but a loaf or two left, and we are thrown back upon inventions, dreams, and new theories and programmes of life. When we get down to programmes we have come to the last crust. Only as we live in the wisdom and righteousness of God, made known to us in the person and priesthood of Christ, have we a well of water springing up into everlasting life, and bread the more it is dispersed the more it gathers in a significant accumulation and benediction. Woe be unto us when we lose the idea of Christmas in some form—mythical, ideal, dreamy, historical, reminiscent, religious, divine; in some form we must keep this day. It brings us very near to God, and brings God very near to us. Frederick Douglass, the most eloquent man of colour I ever listened to, was very down-hearted once in Nathaniel Hall, Boston. He said he felt he must give up the whole idea of emancipation or liberation on any great scale, he was so disappointed, all his hopes had been so much mocked, he thought he would give it all up. Whereupon there was heard a voice in the assembly, an old negress, a dear old mother, and that voice said, "Frederick, is God dead?" In a moment it was Pentecost with that greatest of orators; the fire came, the wind from heaven blew, and he stood erect a minister of God. So it is that we sometimes need some kindly womanly voice, some child's bewitching smile, the masonic grip of some hand that would find our heart if it could. Where can we realise all this experience so much as in the Church of God, when we are all assembled in one place, when we are filled with one expectancy, and when we are sure that God will come to us if we steadfastly and lovingly wait upon Him? This is the spirit that keeps the world moving; not the speech of the profane man, not the shout of the brawler, not the clamour of those who imagine a vain thing, but that all-penetrating religious force that is still dominant in the world, still a witness to the presence and the authority of

the throne of God. Many a time we have come into the sanctuary down-hearted, and have gone out of it with a song. Blessed be those preachers who can inspire us, lift us to a new level, and speak the word of courage when the night is very dark and the wind is blowing dead in our face and is cruel with icy morsels. Oh, then we need the prophet crying in the wilderness and the man whose hope cannot be quenched by tumult or storm.

We have come to worship the Son of God. May I tell you that I worship God the Son? I object to the word the "Divine" Son of God; it may mean one of two things or one of several things; it is an open door through which men may pass into intellectual libertinism. I therefore believe in God manifest in the flesh. I am not scarified even by the alteration of the word in the Revised Version as to the mere settlement and new relation of words. What I say to Jesus every morning, the name I know Him by is, "My Lord and my God!" Then I am master of the day; come or go what will, if I am right with the Son of God I am right with all men. It may not be momentarily so, but it is ultimately and permanently so. "To him that overcometh will I give to sit with Me on My throne." There is a process of overcoming, tugging, wrestling, watching, a marvellous process of combat and collision and occasional concussion. But down through all the storm there falls this sweetest song, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne." Then, hearts up! Onward, Christian soldiers! Worship is not a mere sentiment; worship is a great practical force. Do not be afraid of the word sentiment; it is a softening, healing, comforting word. Without sentiment much energy would be simply lost. We are indebted to the sentiment of the dew for the richness of the literal flower. Only Christ can make things go right, and He is very slow about it, as we count slowness.

I have just passed through an experience that is encouraging and discouraging. Is it possible for any London newspaper issued daily to live without gambling and drinking? I am sometimes afraid it is not. Christians are dead, or they would soon answer

the inquiry triumphantly. But who can move a theoretical Christian who nods over his hymn-book, who counts his own beads in his own ecclesiastical way? who can get at him? A religious daily newspaper in London? Not without a betting column, not without the gambling news. Is that so? I do not say it is so in any hopeless tone, yet I do candidly express a fear which I should like you as part of the churches to remove. The so-called churchgoer likes to know the betting; he does—the knave, the hypocrite! He will lay down his hymn-book and psalm-book to see how the betting went yesterday. Not all Christians; I am speaking of the nominal or theoretical churchgoer. If even this one congregation could be so fired by the Holy Spirit as to say, "Come or go what will, this shall be done, there shall be a Daily Witness for God and truth, justice, freedom, progress," it would be done. There are some narrow-minded, ill-fed Christians who are standing in the way of the greatest reformation England has ever seen, and that is in the region of journalism. The letters I have received from nominal Christians have disgusted me. Instead of standing up and saying, "You have done what you could under the circumstances, go on, and God prosper you, and we will stand by you," they have discovered a word here or a word there. If they would turn their microscopes on their own souls, if souls they have, the work would be accomplished, and accomplished triumphantly in the name and grace of Christ. But most Christians are invalids; the Church has become an hospital, and nurses are wanted. We are losing the Christ-idea. When He came He came with this daily spoken journalism, if I may use the expression, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." We have reduced His sermons to small discourses, watered down, made acceptable to jaded appetite, and manliness—always saving brilliant but much-suffering exceptions—manliness is dead.

We have come to worship Him. One man will worship Him in one way, and another in another, but the spirit of the common worship will be the same. The heart will make its own liturgy; the penitential soul will formulate its own prayers. What affects me most, so as almost to drive me from the pulpit, and to

seek a nook where I can peruse the old history of old heroism, is that there are so many people who are afraid that other people might be amazed and in some degree offended. "I do not speak for myself," says the poor little member of no-parliament, "I do not speak for myself, but I am thinking, you know, of other people." Don't think of them! do the right, and let the other people come round you. Don't you descend upon them and mingle with their hypocrisies and selfish theories and conceptions, but work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, knowing that it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure. "Oh!" said somebody to my wife when she was in Scotland on a Sunday morning. She naturally went to the piano. In Scotland? Yes! On a Sunday morning? Yes! She was a fearless girl, she never knew what fear was; and what she was as a girl she was as a woman—upright, magnanimous, generous, courageous. She went to the piano and played a hymn-tune on Sunday; and the door opened, and her aunt came in, and said, "Emma! shut the piano! what will the neighbours think?" All that sort of thing is dying down even in Scotland.

Benediction.

Grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the Triune God, be our constant Bethlehem. Amen.

Voluntary ... ... "Pastoral Symphony" ... *(Messiah) Handel*
Carol ... ..."Saviour, Who didst make Thy dwelling" ... ... *Adlam*
The Lord's Prayer.—*Field.*
Hymn 88 ..."Christians, awake, salute the happy morn"
Scripture Lesson. Heb. i. 1-6.
Anthem 54 ... ... "There were shepherds" ... ... *Vincent*
Solo: Miss STANLEY LUCAS.
Prayer.
Hymn 83 ... ... "O come, all ye faithful."
Sermon.
Offertory and Solo:
Recit. ... ... "Comfort ye" ... ... } (*Messiah*)
Air ... ..."Every valley shall be exalted" ... } *Handel*
Mr. WILLIAM A. SHEEN.
Hymn 84 ... "Hark! the herald angels sing."
Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod.*
Cornet Solo ... ... "Emmanuel" ... ... *E. St. Quentin*
Mr. GEORGE HARLOW.

[*Thursday Morning, December 27th*, 1900.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thy law fadeth not; Thy strength is an everlasting strength. If any man trust in Thee he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters. Our sufficiency is of God; Thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think: may we have faith to put Thy strength to the test. Sometimes we need the whole fulness of God, so cold is the wind, so deep the valley, so trying all the line of our withering life. When we need Thee most Thou art most near to us; we can lean on Thee. If Thou dost not remove the burden Thou dost increase the strength to bear it. Yea, Thy voice to us is this: Sufficient unto the day is the trial thereof, the evil and the good; test Me, rest on Me, partake of the fulness of My river. We come to Thy house morning by morning, yea, day by day, either here or in the larger Church, or in the smaller church of home, that we may renew our trust in God and draw from His river what water we need. The Lord pity us in our littleness, lead us in our blindness, multiply His favours and compassions towards us day by day. May we live in the light of a great hope, may we be ministered unto by watching angels. Read the lesson of each season to our hearts, we humbly pray Thee. If we come upon the birth-time, or the time of crucifixion, or the hour of Pentecost, the Lord come to us according to the coming day. Stablish Thy kingdom in our hearts, we humbly pray Thee; give us largeness and steadfastness of faith; may we not be as some who are driven about by every wind of doctrine, but may we have our souls resting in the living God, feeding ever more upon the body and blood of the Lord Jesus, and drawing from the priestly Cross all that we need by way of cleansing and support and daily inspiration. Omit not from Thy love what we may omit from our prayers; read Thou with Thine own kind, loving eyes the need of the whole world, and according to the world's necessity minister, we humbly pray Thee, of Thy grace. Our poor prayer is made great and wise and prevalent by the name of Jesus Christ, Son of God, the only Saviour of the world. Amen.

CXXII.

LIVING TESTIMONY.

"*Do we begin again to commend ourselves?*"—2 Cor. iii. 1-6.

S life to be a continual apology? Have we every morning to present a letter of introduction to our warmest friends? Have we to be introduced by a third party, you and I who have known each other so long and so intimately? Do we always stand upon the particular daily defence? "Need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you?" Every time we meet you, do you look strangely at us? There are some people with whom we never get any further on; after seven years we are still strangers. They exhaust us, they always wait for us to begin, they seem to look upon us as persons who ought to account for themselves for being in existence at all; every morning it is the same dull interrogatory face. These people do not know what mischief they work in the world, how without speaking they wear out all their friends, so that their friends on retiring from them feel quite tired; they are persons who have no gift of initiation, no gift of conversation; they sit and stare at you with jellyfish eyes until you feel absolutely exhausted and disgusted. The apostle says to these Corinthian friends, Do you need another letter of introduction? would you like us to be certified? we have been amongst you some time, I have written letters to you, we have had conversations, divers instances of happy fellowship, and yet there is an influence somehow going about the Corinthian Church that seems to require me, Paul the apostle, every day to bring with me a new letter to explain that I am the Paul to whom you once gave your confidence. Need we letters of commendation? are we driven to this sad pass that we have to live upon testimonials? He is a poor man who is reduced to his album or scrapbook into which he has gummed the references which other people have permitted him to use. Some men are overborne and killed by their testimonials. It is impossible for anybody to be quite

so good as the testimonials make them out to be. When a man has to live up to a testimonial that was written with the pen of insincerity and flattery you need not wish him any worse lot. Now, saith the apostle, have we to bring letters to you? there are men going about who are corrupting the Gospel, preaching Christ amongst you not of sincerity, but that they may weaken my influence and the influence of the other apostles; they may need letters of commendation, they are in great need of testimonials, but are you going to rank us with the same class? God forbid! Ye are our letters, yourselves are our commendation, your own lives are the translated and incarnated Gospel of Christ. That is the proof, and that is the confidence we have in this Gospel. It renews men, it re-establishes character, it illustrates itself in flesh and blood. How curious it is that some people call you to stand in the witness-box every morning that they may examine and cross-examine you as if they had never seen you before! Do not encourage their acquaintance; shake off their patronage. What is true confidence? It is not established by cross-examination upon every little or great incident that occurs in life. I have confidence in the man; I care, therefore, next to nothing as to the mere incident or accident which may in some way punctuate the literature of his daily life. You cannot withdraw my confidence in that man; I know him, I have lived with him, I have seen him in joy and in sorrow, I have watched him under the terrible strain and stress of life; you cannot, therefore, palm off upon me any lies about him. So would the apostles live with the churches to whom they ministered. They said in effect, We do not live upon testimonials or upon letters of credit, and we are not going to be put into the witness-box and examined and cross-examined by any man who is briefed to make our life a poignant distress; we stand upon character, solid, massive, majestic character. It is like the apostle; no man was so majestically humble as was the Apostle Paul.

How wondrously he puts the case in verse 3! He puts it in negatives and in positives. Listen to him, it will be an education to hear so precise

and judicial speaker:—"Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink"—that is the first negative—"but with the Spirit of the living God"—that is the positive—"not in tables of stone"—that is the second negative—"but in fleshy tables of the heart." It is well to have double proofs; it is convenient to be able to argue the case from either side. There are those who can only understand the negative, the apostle is ready for them; there are those who would like a taste of the positive, the apostle is ready to give them just what they desire. Therefore he says, This is not a pen-and-ink matter, written testimonials are not worth the paper they are written upon; language changes, circumstances vary, and therefore we must have something more than pen-and-ink testimonials. What is that something more? The testimony of the living Spirit or the Spirit of the living God. The proof is in the men, in the very atmosphere they breathe, in the music to which they respond, in the motives by which they are animated and sanctified; these are the proofs of the power of the Gospel of Christ. "Not in tables of stone": even marble crumbles away, even monumental brass corrodes; there must be something better therefore. So the apostle says, These epistles are written on the fleshy tables of the heart, these testimonials are kept in the chest of love; these proofs are proofs fiery as blood, being gentle, quenchless as love. Of course those people who are so backward as only to be able to read writing will require references and testimonials and cards of introduction every morning. I do not despise these people, I never despise a child who is just learning his letters; I smile, I encourage, I cheer the little learner; but if he were to get up and say, "I know as well as the Prime Minister of England how this ought to be done," I should set him down on his feet and leave him there; he is too all-sufficient for me. So there are people who are still in their letters, and as long as they know it I love them, cheer them, and say, You will do better next year, keep on, persevere, and you will one day be an excellent reader of character. The Apostle Paul says, We do not live in our epitaphs; if you want to know

what we are, we do not take you down to the churchyard that you may read the gravestones to learn what our fathers were; we hold you in our hearts, we expect you to hold us in your hearts; this church life is a fellowship of love, trust, great, expansive, and triumphant charity.

The Apostle Paul was proud of the Church: "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men." The beautiful thing is Paul was not only religiously proud of the Church, but he was candid and just enough to say so. How long shall I insist that you should be more cordial with your friends, with your colleagues, with wives and children, husbands and brothers and pastors? The Church has a great gift of receiving all heaven's blessings through the medium of the apostles, and saying nothing about them. It is astonishing how reserved many congregations are. Many a poor minister—I say nothing of myself, for I have nothing to complain of, and I am just leaving the ministry, of whose mechanical lines I am utterly tired—how many poor ministers have never known that you were profited by this or that sermon! You received all the profit, and said nothing; you listened and were warmed and comforted, and never mentioned it. That is a great gift of reserve—too great a gift. How could you take a little flower from a little child and not say, Thank you? the little child would be affronted, nay, would be grieved. Why, a thank you would have made the whole day bright; the little child would somehow get the notion that you liked the flower and would have liked another if it could have been gathered there and then. But you have for the last ten years heard your minister in the village and have been blessed so far as he could instrumentally bless you, and you never named it—never! Oh the sorrow, the misery, your silence has inflicted! God forgive you! And if the same apply to the ministry, then the minister must be blamed in equal degree, if not in greater proportion. If any man has received blessings from his people and never named the fact, then he was not worthy to receive such testimonies of love. The whole intercourse should be more thoroughly and obviously and responsively reciprocal, so that one

life may help another and all the lives gather together in one effluence of love that shall be sent out far away to bless other people. Persons could not hear a eulogy from a man like Paul without having a sense of responsibility awakened in their hearts. Sometimes praise first depresses a man and then inspires him. Thus:—"The apostle said that I was in his heart; to be in such a heart is honour enough for a king: does he know how poor a creature I am? Would he keep me longer in his heart if he knew how faithless I am? If he has this opinion of me I must really awake; he compels me by his very eulogy and utterance of praise to do something at least approximately worthy of such an encomium; he thinks I am a hard worker in the Church, and I am not; he thinks he owes very much of his pastoral success to my sympathy, influence, and activity; poor soul! if he only knew how little I do! but I must do more; if he thinks I am worthy of so graphic a testimonial as he has given me I must do more; what can I do? A thousand things; for love is inventive, love never faileth even in invention as well as in gift and service. This eulogy may have a great meaning. The very praise of some men is a kind of fame. The right kind of fame is the beginning of immortality. I was downhearted when I heard him talk about me, he shook hands warmly with me, he never did anything coldly, I feel the grip of that soft little hand now; and he said, I rely upon you, you have been my partner and comforter many a time, and when I am weary and downhearted and wayworn, I think of you, and your face comes up before me like a radiant apparition, and I take heart again." I could then and there have cursed myself with a bitter curse that I should have deceived so good a man. He looked at me, not with his penetrating eyes, which could pierce a mask, but he looked at me through his gentle love, and I feel as if I had taken him in, as if I had aggravated my lack of faith and lack of courage. Thus eulogy, let us say again and again, bestowed by good men, by warm hearts, develops a sense of responsibility, first bringing red shame to both cheeks, and then setting the heart to work to find out what can be done to pay off arrears and come up straight with the living date.

In verse 5 you find the key and the explanation of everything. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God." What a religious man the apostle was! Not merely a theologian. It is possible to teach theology and to finish the lecture with a silent oath. Theology is treated in some countries as a mere science; it is something to be explained; the lecturer cares nothing about it, whether right or wrong, true or false, but he says, "It begins at these historical points, takes such and such a career around the philosophy of things, and ends with such and such a judgment seat, and such and such a destiny; that is what it is; I say nothing about my own appreciation of it; I have delivered my lecture, and I bid you good day." That is done in many universities on the continent of Europe. The man is never asked whether he believes what he teaches, he simply teaches things from a purely historical or external point of view. How different the Apostle Paul! He passed everything through his own personal experience, he tried everything by the necessity of his own life, he looked at his necessity and said, How can it be met? He seemed to measure his want, and to say, "What is there that can sustain me in these straits and difficulties? I am pelted, smitten, stung; I am left out in the cold, I am forbidden the houses of the great; why do I stand all this, and how am I able to bear it? for I am in nakedness and in peril and in cold and in hunger; is this my own sinew, muscle, fortitude? No, my sufficiency is of God; therefore if I fail it is God that fails; He is my banker, my treasurer, He keeps the gold of my love, the jewel of my faith, and every morning I draw upon His great treasury, so it will not be Paul, it cannot be Paul the apostle that fails, but somehow or other it will be God that fails, or the current has been cut and I am no longer in junction with the Heart of the universe." As it is individually, so it must be ecclesiastically. We have no life but in Christ. If we do not renew that life from time to time Christ will be grieved, He will think we do not trust Him any longer; we shall grow in self-sufficiency, saying, "We can do this without any reference to the supernatural, there need not be any prayer to-day, we can go in our own strength and

remove mountains by magic of our own." When that day comes our life is dead, our life is but another form of death, we are beginning a downward and perdition-ward course. "Give us this day our daily bread": a passage that cannot be translated; the word the Saviour used there has been expounded in volumes; some of the most difficult and learned treatises have been written upon the word which Jesus Christ employed in that prayer; nobody can fully explain it, it means something coming, coming, always, the gift of God; and yet the very best form of expression is an expression which is not a translation, and which has no reference to the immediate etymology of the curious word. Yet there it stands, the best thing that can be said about it, "Give us this day our daily bread." Can you not make bread for yourselves? No, not this bread; this is the true bread that cometh down from heaven, of which if a man eat he shall hunger no more. Lord, evermore give us this bread! How often? Daily; give us this bread, our daily bread. So we come to God for everything, for every idea, every inspiration, every grade and form of comfort. Our sufficiency is of God. Then how intimate those must be that go to Him every day, who would think a day nothing but a great cloud if they did not just go to God! He makes the day, He makes the light, He is the glory. How He finds His way into the heart He knows best, for He made the heart. No man can make a key for that lock; the Lord who made the heart knows the way to the heart, pities the sinking heart, feeds the hungering heart. O let us come to Him every day that we may find out by experiencing the *Epiousios* this untranslatable experience.

Have you marked how wonderfully the Trinity is outlined in all this? "The living God," "the epistle of Christ," "the Spirit of the living God." You cannot get rid of the Trinity. Here it is; Christ is spoken of with God and with the Spirit of the living God. You could not put a mere man within that surrounding. The living God, the Spirit of the living God, and a man in between—that would mar the music, that would spoil the vision; the harmony is in the united Deity. "My Lord, and my God!"

I say to Christ, and other words would be too small, too mean, worthless, when I find that He is in the midst of the Deity.

The great lesson of this meditation is that we may dismiss the apostle and leave One greater than he to ask these questions and press these arguments. I have imagined my Lord and my God taking the place of His greatest apostle, and saying, Do I begin again to commend Myself? do you need some fresh argument that I was, when you hailed Me as your Saviour, you trusted Me as your Lord, you paid gold of the heart tribute to Me as your Cæsar, the true abiding king; latterly you have fallen off, you have lost enthusiasm: behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man open the door, I will come in. Do I begin again to commend myself? Is my Christian love to be shaped into a formal argument? Do you really consider the position? Is it not so when we go into church? What is the man in the pulpit doing? He is vindicating Christ, setting up what is called in formal language an apologetic. Indeed there is a course of reading which may be brought under that category of apologetics, as if my Lord needed a daily letter, another card of introduction; all the centuries that intervene between His Bethlehem and this present recognition of His birth go for nothing; here is a man who is going to prove that Jesus once lived; he thinks he can prove it by Pagan historians, he calls in the aid of classical history. Away! The Lord has been born in my heart the hope of glory. Yet you see sedate-looking congregations listening after nineteen hundred years of historical experience to a vindication of the Lord's personality, and you see written in lists by experts that Strauss's Life of Jesus, the *Leben Jesu*, is one of the most remarkable histories and books of the century. I read it long ago, and I am still a Christian; I read it, and reviews upon it, and heard lectures concerning it, and I am still at the feet of Jesus. I did not believe in Jesus because this date corresponded with that date, and some other date seemed to cast doubt upon a certain other date which somebody had found in very recondite and almost impenetrable places; my faith was not grounded on

that, or it might have been taken away. But I just read His story, I read it all; first as told by one man, and then as told by the other three men, and I said, "Never man spake like this Man." He said He gave His flesh and His blood for the world. He said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." He said to me in my quiet little corner, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." And when I looked my wonder He said, "I and My Father are one." And I wondered; then He said to me, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest"; and then He said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." And I went one day to Him, carrying all my black sins like a great burden, and the moment He saw me and saw the tears in mine eyes, He said, "Son, thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee." And I believed, and am here to-day, an old man tottering on the brink of the grave, to say, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." I want to die a Christian minister, a minister of the Cross, of the blood, of the atoning Christ. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly!

Thus we close another year. We begin our Thursday year next week; to-day we close the year of sadness and darkness deep and black, yet not without some radiance, certainly not without many divine encouragements. Next year shall we have another Bible just to secure freshness in the ministry? The moment the ministers forsake the Bible they forsake all freshness, all true modernity and vital relation to the ages. We shall not have another Bible, we shall just have the same dear old book. I am quite willing to part with it on one condition, and that is that you will put a better book in its place. Until that better book is forthcoming, I shall, God helping me, try to make the most and the best of the Bible we have. . . . How many things are completing! It is a world of endings, good-byes, and tremulous farewells; but there are as many beginnings as there are endings, thus God keeps the world young, and none can stay the benevolence of His purpose.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, sweet gifts of heaven, abide with us, till we close the doxologies and begin the hallelujahs of the world unseen. Amen.

[*Sunday Morning, January 20th*, 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would join the song of praise, because Thine hand has been stretched out to us in plenteousness and in token of warm welcome. We would not be silent in God's house, for we have received of God's mercy; we will answer the mercy with a song, and we will be glad before the Lord because faith shall triumph over doubt. We come with our shout, our song, our high utterance of praise. We bring Thee what we can; our hearts are hot towards Thee in the vehemence of love; we have no words with which to express our affection, but we can hint at the burning desire to praise Thee with our whole being. Thou hast distributed Thy gifts and Thy providences variously, but Thou knowest where each gift is, Thou dost pursue with vigilance and judgment the line of distribution; Thou wilt come again and reckon with us, Thou wilt ask an account from every servant and steward of Thine: blessed is that servant who, when his Lord cometh, shall be found watching, waiting, ready. How wondrous is this life, intermingled as it is with death! But we are learning better things even of death itself, we have been with Jesus and have learned of Him. He speaks of life, He speaks of heaven; we would listen to Him and thus receive Thy blessing upon the very sacrament of our misery. Sometimes we think Thee cruel, not knowing what Thou art doing; sometimes the darkness is sevenfold midnight, without a candle to relieve the gathering gloom; then our hearts sink, then we say, God hath forgotten to be gracious, and where we cannot pray we begin to despair, and we turn icy cold in our chilling misery. Then Thou dost come upon us like a warm summer morning, and all things beautiful betoken Thy coming, all things lovely rise up and say, Behold, the King draweth nigh! On such days we have delight, joy, high anthems, great festivals; we think we shall never see death, nor shall we ever be in the bonds and misery of despair again. And thus day and night, summer and winter, exchanging places, come upon us and help out the time and the purpose of our education. Thou art filling the whole heaven now with shadows, and the earth is like an open grave. There is death on the right hand, and on the left, and great fear between, and we know not what shall be on the morrow, and our faith is sorely exercised. To-day we say with warm hearts, God save the Queen! We love her memory, we appreciate her wondrous virtues, and if she is to say farewell we can hardly wonder, and yet there is a tugging at our hearts, and there is a sensation as of choking and

of bewilderment, as if we would not know what to do if this or that should happen. Yet Thou art the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and all the thrones are under Thy feet. We give our Mother Queen into Thine hands, Thou loving One, and pray for her the richest blessings, the truest comforts, that can be bestowed upon mortal creature. The Lord watch by her, spare her to us if it may be so; if not, and if our Mother Queen shall be taken away from us, we know she shall go to Thyself and be for ever with the Lord. Our loving prayers are round about her bed, we watch with eyes of love by the couch on which she lies; we are listening for music: if Thou dost send us great silence, may we know the meaning of it and be ourselves prepared more and more for the final destiny. The Lord look upon the nations, upon all the people, upon all rulers, guides, leaders, and teach us what to do in hours of distress and bitter perplexity. The Lord be also with the common mass of mankind. We are here to-day representing all conditions of life, of sorrow, of joy, wealth, and poverty. The Lord look upon us for the sake of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Because He loved us and gave Himself for us, let the Lord send blessings through the medium of His Cross. Amen.

CXXIII.

"LITTLE FAITH."

THE only Man that ever used these words was Jesus Christ. How often did He use them? Only four times. It will be interesting to gather the four instances in which these words, "O ye of little faith," occur. There are only four of them; they ought to be special to our memory, and profitable to our hearts. They are extraordinary words; they give a hint of what the true kingdom of God is; they are a kind of standard by which to measure our status and position in that kingdom, if we are in it at all. We have become so accustomed to these words that we think they occur twenty or thirty times in the speech of Christ. The truth is they occur only four times, and always by way of rebuke; yet there was a tender blessing

under each reproach. I do not think the reproaches of Christ, as delivered to His disciples, ever ended in themselves. It seemed a curious thing that the Jew could not end with a reproach if he could possibly help it when he was reading the Scriptures; he would rather go forward to the next part of the scroll, whether it belonged to the series or not which preceded it; it seemed to him, a priest of God, that it would not be right to end with a rebuke, a judgment, a threatened calamity; so at all risks he would, so to say, bound forward to the next point of music, and would close every reading with some words like opening flowers or like the beginnings of songs. Jesus Christ never rebuked the disciples without in some way, the way being always His own, comforting, strengthening, and exhilarating the very hearts that He seemed to discourage.

Where is the relieving word in "O ye of little faith"? It is in two places, and we must find them. The word is not, O ye of little sagacity. Christ has not come down to the world to talk about intellectual gifts and attributes, and to set forth His kingdom under the figure of intellectual status and authority. The world never was sagacious, it was only cunning; to the point of cunning it had in some cases brought itself. But it knew nothing about the larger prudence, the penetrating sagacity, the grasp that takes hold of the entire unit, the perfect integer. "O ye of little faith." Where is the first instance? It is in Matthew vi. 30. "Shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Not clothe you because you are of little faith, but clothe you because He loves you, and would love you if you were to smite Him in the face. God is love. Think of it, My poor disciples: God clothes birds and beasts, God allows nothing to die of neglect; do you suppose then that He is going to allow you to die naked and starved? What is My reason for putting this argument before you? It is that God is so careful about beasts and birds and birds' nests and lilies that He must think of you, and think of you just in proportion as you are more and better than they. Do you not see that?—that if He were to allow you to die of starvation, and to keep all the beasts and birds in plentiful food, why

He would lose His character as God. You would see all this, My Peter and John and James, if you had more faith. If you ask me what faith is I cannot altogether explain it to you; you must feel it, your soul, must explain it without words. We sometimes say, there is an atmosphere about this or that, or, all things seem to be tending in such and such a direction; we cannot put them into measurable and terminable words; but these thoughts are the very comfort of our souls. So it is in the inner, upper, and larger world. If we had more faith we would have more hope, and if we had more hope we would have more love, and after love there is nothing, for God is love. He rebukes anxiety, fretfulness. "What shall we do when this garment is worn out? Where shall we find a refuge when the present roof of our poor house is blown off by some wild wind? What shall we do if the next harvest be stormy, rainy, tumultuous? What shall we do under such and such circumstances?" That is man; you see he wants to be God. These very inquiries indicate that he wants to see, and, if possible, rule the future, and God will not have it. Anxiety is atheism. Many a man who would repudiate the suggestion that he is an atheist, who would be really indignant at the very thought, is playing the atheist all the time. He says, What shall I do if next harvest shall be as bad as the last harvest was? That is atheism; the man is taking his life into his own hands; the man is fretting about it with a most irreligious peevishness. He does not rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, and say, Though the fig-tree shall not blossom, that shall not interfere with the roll and the swell and the cadence of my song. Many men are atheists in little parts and patches of their nature, they are disbelievers in the very act of drinking the sacramental symbolic wine. They think they are Christians, in some sense they mean to be Christians. God asks us to prove our faith by simply leaving everything in His hands. "Trust Me" is His pathetic appeal to every soul; and the soul gives but a sullen response, if it give any answer at all in some cases.

Where is the word that relieves this rebuke? It

is the word "little." There is something, if it be only a film of faith, if it be but a microscopic plasm of faith or trust in God. He does not say, "O ye of no faith." The word "little" is a gospel, the word "little" gives confidence to the heart; the word "little," which at first is a rebuke, is actually a recognition, and in some sort a sign of Divine confidence. You can do nothing with the dead; if there is a little life, a mere spark of life, something may be done with it. We find that spark in the word "little faith." Most professing Christians are Christians in parts and patches. They have their small redemptive features, they save themselves from the laughter and contempt of devils by at least going in the body to church now and then: their hearts are not in the building where their bodies rest. With regard to faith, we break it up into features, attributes, small sections; thus we tear the seamless robe of God, and each man gets a rag to himself, and thinks it is the whole garment of Divinity. Men who can see this on the line of other illustrations do not see it on the line of the development of their own faith in its massiveness and unity, its absolute solidarity. Thus this man confides to me in pastoral conference just where he stands. I will idealise the interview. He says: "With regard to the Christian faith, I know that here and there and one or two other places, there are points that I would not give up on any account whatever." He thinks he will be saved by points, but the Lord told him that he would be saved by faith. What is this man doing? He is breaking up a unit into splinters and fractions, and thus is orthodox in points and at particular places, and he tries to make up for his lack of orthodoxy in other positions and relations by his irrational vehemence about certain detached features and phases of faith. And I answer him thus: You are perfectly certain that you are strong on the points you have indicated? And he replies, Most unquestionably. Then I continue, and say, You are like a man who has particular stops and pipes in the organ he would not be without on any account, but he has not the organ; that is just the difference. He says, Now, I would on no account part with the clarionet in the organ. What do you say about the *voix*

celestes? I think it is ineffably charming, I would not give it up on any account. And the *vox humana?* I am not so sure about that particular *vox;* I sometimes think it a little harsh and staccato; I think I could do without that. But God put you in trust of the organ, He did not leave you to say which parts you like, this pipe, and that stop, these I will appreciate, and upon these points I am awfully orthodox. O fool, and slow of heart! the organ, like the faith, is a whole.

Where is the next instance of this charge of little faith? It is in Matthew viii. 26—"Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Why, if you had faith, the sea could not drown you, the sea would rock you and nurse like a mother, and sing lullabies to you in your infantile weakness. Why are ye so little? your faith is less than your fear; in other words, your fear overcomes your faith, and where there is fear there cannot be joyous prayer, there cannot be triumphant faith. Now you must get rid of one or the other, or the fear will conquer the faith, or the faith will conquer the fear; wherever fear exists and operates it disables man. Is he going to make a speech to his fellow men? If he fear their faces he will never make the speech. "The fear of man bringeth a snare." He says, If so-and-so were removed from the audience I think I could speak. But he could not speak wholeheartedly and with rushing, clamant, dominant power; he would be thinking all the while what the obnoxious man was thinking then,—as if it mattered anything what any man thought from a merely intellectual and artistic point of view of the Gospel of grace and the kingdom of God. If the Gospel of grace or the kingdom of God took hold of you, you would not see a soul in the crowd, you would be devoured by your speech, you would be absorbed, inspired, ennobled, transfigured. If you had faith you could meet a roadful of lions, and never see them. The lions know when the traveller does not see them. It is a wonderful thing, call it by what name you please, but the dog knows when you are frightened of him, and then does he not play the dog! He sees in a moment that he can make a fool of you, and being always ready for a little recreation, he plays upon

your fear. The little child is not frightened, therefore the child goes up and shakes the dog by the mouth, and the dog likes it. The nettle seems to know when you are afraid of it; you touch it very gently, and it pricks you accordingly and burns your blood; but you go up to it and take hold of the nettle boldly and fearlessly, and the nettle is as it were afraid of you, and hopes you will never come down that lane again. It is a mysterious thing, call it telepathy or by any other Greek name, but there is the singular fact, that nature herself seems to know the kind of people who are dealing with her. I should not wonder if some afternoon far ahead, when time ceases to be acknowledged by ages, it shall be revealed to us that the sea was laughing at us all the time we were so afraid about the deep waters, and that many gurgles of the deep sea were only a kind of laugh at our timidity and our fear.

Where does the next instance occur? This will be the third instance, and there are only four. It occurs in Matthew xiv. 31: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Thus we have had rebuke of anxiety, rebuke of fear, and now we have rebuke of doubt. We live in faith; confidence is our strength. If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would say to this mountain, Get thee gone, and the mountain would not stay one moment longer. That is the true ideality of faith. Faith is strength, faith is, within its own limitations, omnipotence. It hath pleased God so to constitute us and so to constitute the universe. What wilt thou? believest thou that I am able to do this? Dost thou believe it fully, wholly, with thine entire heart, without so much as one quaver or tremor of doubt? Yea, Lord. Then be it done unto thee according to thy faith.

And the last instance is in Matthew xvi. 8: "O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?" Why will you make great subjects into little ones? why will you make the spiritual into the material? why do you drag things backwards, and fix upon them small and almost flippant interpretations? There is nothing in all the church of nature that is not sacramental, significant,

symbolical. Why do you therefore not take hold of larger views? why always be going down instead of going up? As if I could be angry with you because you had not brought a loaf or two more bread! Why are you such bad exponents of my personality and my purpose in life? Have I ever taught you this, or given you the slightest reason to believe that it is because you are short of a loaf that I have given you these instructions and admonitions? Have I not broken one loaf into a whole feast? have you ever wanted? do you suppose that we cannot make loaves on this sea, if need be, or in this wilderness? O ye of little faith, I am afraid you will make the Gospel little. How can I trust you to go out with the Gospel? you will be so material, and so what you call simple in natural applications; sometimes I feel as though I dare not trust you with the Gospel because it is so big, so large, so noble, and you will belittle it down into small anecdotes and into transient events. I am sometimes weary when I think what I shall do with you in the matter of this ministry. I think you will be breaking up the kingdom of God into little parcels and items and dogmas and programmes and small but well-stamped theologies. I mean you to be like the fresh air, to be like the morning, the summer morning; I mean you to be the greatest musicians in the world, I mean you to go forth and entrance and enchain the attention of the world by the vastness and magnificence of your revelations. And if you say, "We have brought no bread," and begin to make an anecdote of your own experience, and degrade your own little doubts into atheisms, how can you convert the world?

These are the instances in which Jesus Christ spoke of, "O ye of little faith." There is a fifth instance, but only a repetition of one that occurred in the four, and therefore I omit it from my table of contents. Then we are self-blamable; it is because we have little faith, hardly any faith at all. Faith is the gift of God. If we had more faith we should have more life, more energy, more hope, and more beneficence. If we had more faith we would take an optimistic view of the world; if we had a real Christian faith as Christ taught, expounded, and ex-

emplified it, we would find the cemetery turned into a garden. Still, let us be thankful if we have even a little faith, even if we are in the merest primer of the soul's scholarship. "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief." Then let us go to the Source for more power. I repeat, faith is the gift of God. Lord, increase our faith; give us more and more faith, the faith that takes God at His word. Methinks my Lord would delight in His heaven to be taken simply and directly at His word. "I have not seen so great faith, no, not in Israel," said He on one occasion. "Great is thy faith." He stood, and wondered, and said, "I have not seen so great faith in Israel." On another occasion, "Be it unto thee according to thy faith." On another occasion, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." When the Son of man cometh will He find faith on the earth? Argument enough, dispute enough, little miserable creeds enough, but will He find faith?

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, from Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, abide with us, that our faith fail not, but rather increase from day to day, till faith is lost in sight. Amen.

SECOND LESSON: JOHN XI. 21-26.

21. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

22. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. [*O the delicateness of this filigree! She makes no suggestion that can be set down in words, but there are some hints that are like summer dawns.*]

23. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.

24. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again [*but it is so far off*] in the resurrection at the last day. [*I know he shall be part of something large and universal.*]

25. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life [*It is all here and now; and I am the Last Day, and the First*]: he that believeth in me, though he were [*what you call*] dead [*really there is no such thing as death*], yet shall he live:

26. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? [*How much of a woman art thou?*]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou didst make us, and not we ourselves. Thou wilt not forsake the work of Thine own hands ; Thou knowest how much we can bear, how much we can suffer. Thou knowest us altogether ; there is not a word on our tongue, there is not a thought in our heart, but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it, yea, before it was there. Thou art the living God, we are for the moment but dying men. Yet we shall live in God through Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath brought life and immortality to light in the Gospel. Thou knowest the shadow that is over the empire ; all the stars seem to be dead, and there is nothing above us and around us but a great cloud. Clouds and darkness are round about Thee, but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne. We have not built upon the temporal and the transient, we have built upon the eternal and the abiding ; we hide our little years in the years that are at God's right hand. We are in new relations to-day ; there is a feeling of strangeness in our hearts ; something has gone out, other influences have come in, and in the change, almost amounting to a conflict, we are dazed and bewildered for the moment. Thou wilt give us time to consider these things, and to put ourselves in order. Meanwhile, we bring the tribute, the flowers, of a long, vivid, and reverential recollection, and lay them upon the dead form of the Queen. To us she is even yet our Queen ; we stand not amongst technicalities and perishable differences, we cannot empty our hearts all in one moment. Yet we can say all together, "God save the King!" The Lord's blessing be round about him and be the canopy of his throne, the man of his counsel, and the guide of his feet! We pray this in the name of the King of kings, whose throne abideth for ever. Amen.

CXXIV.

REASONS FOR DOUBT.

"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God ——"
—Acts xxvi. 8.

HAT is a new apologetic; that is a strategic move of the first order. This is new to me; that is a master-stroke. What a sagacious statesman was the Apostle Paul! Hitherto we had been thinking that it was the place of faith to give reasons; the apostle pushes the war to the other side, and says, You must give reasons for your doubt. Why, that opens a wide field of criticism and observation and profitable comment. It is the apostle who says, Stand up, and defend yourself; you are a doubter—why do you doubt? give a reason for the doubt and the fear or the unbelief within you. Christian, there is another side, you see, to the great contention. We have always thought it to be our duty to explain to the doubter and the unbeliever how it is that we come to be identified with church ideas and church habits and service. The apostle says to us, You have been short-sighted in this matter, it is time for you now to turn round upon the doubter, and say, Explain; it is your turn to make a statement; we sit and listen and wonder; now tell your tale. I am glad of that; the more chance I give the doubter the more chance I get for the Gospel. Let him have plenty of time; do not interrupt him; you will find that doubt has its difficulties, more in number than faith. Did you think the doubter had an easy time of it? all he has to do is to doubt? Not so; there must be times in the doubter's experience when he wonders and asks questions. Wonder is sometimes very near to prayer; there is a reverence that says, I want to believe. We never speak reproachfully or unkindly of that kind of doubt or reverence. In many a case we say, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. Upon the mocking doubter we can spill our sarcasm and our satire and our scorn; but when a man says, "I believe, Lord, just a little; help Thou mine unbelief,"

we write his name down along with our own, and count him friend and companion and a comrade that will do us good in the day of distress.

I wonder how many exactly follow my purpose in these introductory observations. The point is a point of apostolic policy. He does not say, Now I will explain the whole thing to you. He makes his statement, and then says, Why should it be thought a thing unbelievable, incredible by you, that God should raise the dead? That is the full text; I have broken it off at the word "God" for a special purpose, that I may show, partly by argument, partly by illustration, that doubt has its difficulties, and must give an account of itself, must state the case from the doubter's point of view along the whole line. Do you suppose that atheism has no difficulties and no hours of depression? You think the Christian has many hours of melancholy. I wonder how many hours of melancholy the atheist has. If he thinks that everything made itself he must be depressed sometimes. Nothing that he can handle made itself, the chair he sits upon did not make itself; but the sky that lights him is self-created, self-formed, and came about nobody knows how! No; my reason rises in scornful reply. If the glove I wear did not make itself, it is hard for me to believe that the hand is self-made. This is the way to depression, this is the road to downright heavy sadness of heart. Do you suppose that agnosticism has an easy time of it? Only in the degree in which it is indifferent to its own non-religion. If it could be felt it would destroy the very soul that believes it. "All is empty, all the great dome is an empty canopy, all space is forsaken, abandoned, desolate; if there is anything in it or round about it or above it, it is so far above as utterly to destroy my power of conception." What is your power of conception? A good deal will depend upon that. Can you see through a sheet of brown paper? how far can you see through a lath-and-plaster partition? and you speak about your conception! Oh, if laughter were possible among the higher intelligences they might smile at least when you speak about your conception—a man who was born yesterday, is begging a mouthful of bread to-day, will be dead to-

morrow, and forgotten on the fourth day; and he says, My conception! "The whole idea is inconceivable, incognoscible, in——" I wonder how much further he will go, because every step he takes is into a grosser darkness. Do you suppose that materialism is just seated to hear the preacher, whoever he may be, and saying, Now tell us all about this spirituality of yours? Sometimes the preacher is entitled, following the policy of the Apostle Paul, to say, Materialist, stand up and tell me why it should be a thing incredible with you that there is a spirit, a soul. You make but a poor speech on a great subject; yours is but a halting, stumbling, darksome way of trying to make the intricate simple and the impenetrable accessible; and what if it should turn out that all things are spirit? It would not disturb me for a moment to find that a pebble is a possible son of Abraham; nothing could make me sad and hopeless in the direction of higher and higher life, more and more light, greater and greater possibilities of fellowship with the unseen. I am willing to enlarge the kingdom of heaven rather than to dwarf and belittle it. Materialist, stand up, and talk to us just a moment or two; from the first six words I shall tell your quality. "I have dissected bodies, and I have never found a soul." You can sit down now. In dissecting bodies did you ever find an imagination? In dissecting bodies did you ever find a conscience? Because you found no conscience, no imagination, of course there cannot be any—you see, you would have found them. Did you ever find music? I will not trouble you to find immortality, I will trouble you to find a note of music in your dead carcase: did you ever find one? No, I did not. Then there is none; music is a lie, a dream, an inconceivable thing, because you did not find it. The belief is too small, it grows more and more contemptible for words; I will drop it, and believe still that there is imagination, conscience, music, love, though not one of these things has ever been seen. There is a mystery of light as well as a mystery of darkness, and I prefer the mystery of light.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that all these outward and sensuous things were

created? Tell me, be downright frank with me; why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should have created the universe? I think it is about the most believable statement that can be made; it seems to me, compared with any other theory, the simplest of all philosophies. If I want rest on all these subjects I read Genesis first chapter and first verse:— "In the beginning." When was that? The dateless date. "— God." I like that word; it is a kind of sanctuary word, temple word, there is something in it. "— created." That word is the best I have yet heard upon this subject. All material forces, magnitudes, splendours, utilities were created, set agoing, shaped, vitalised by a Personality equal to the occasion. I like that explanation best. Sirs, it is the most rational explanation. I must have mystery on the one side or the other; I will either have the mystery of light or the mystery of darkness, and I prefer, let me repeat, the mystery of light. Whoever shaped all these things must have been greater than the things he shaped: if so, how great! Why, the carpenter is always bigger than the beam he cuts; the cabinet-maker is a greater man than any chair he ever formed; the author is more than his book; the musician is more than his organ. Author and musician would dash these things to pieces because they so inadequately express the inward metaphysical, spiritual, divine conception and desire.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that all these things are ruled by a gracious and tender and most minute Providence? If you tell me they are so, you give me rest, and you give me peace, and that peace rises into singing joy. Tell me something about this. The very hairs of your head are all numbered; the Lord knows your downsitting and your uprising, your going-out and your coming-in. Is that so? Yes. He clothed the grass of the field which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven; will He therefore allow you to go stark naked? No; I see that. He taught the bird how to round and warm its nest; and has He taken no care of your house, your children, and the whole tragedy of your home-life? No, I should say on hearing such a suggestion that it is not only

cruel, but absurd. Look at your own life if you want to prove the mystery and the beneficence of godly, overruling, and providential issues. It is not with us a question of words, mere formal argument; I know that God has rocked me in His arms, I know that He has taught me to walk; I am sure He has not been absent from my life now at seventy that I see how things shape themselves. Why, they have been built into a temple, and I stand in silence for a moment and then break into grateful song, and then say, This—my own poor little wayward, curious life—this is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. If I were to renounce belief in Providence I would simply commit intellectual and moral suicide, I should have to destroy my own character before I could destroy my theology. That is the theology I cannot get rid of. There may be a kind of formal and academic theology that can be torn to pieces and thrown upon the flying winds, but this theology of my own consciousness, my own experience, why, I have almost with these eyes of the body seen God going ahead of me to open the gate that I may pass through. I will not deny Him, I will praise Him with a loud voice, I will crowd holy anthems on His name.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that we are going on through Christ Jesus, Man of the Cross, Man of the redeeming blood, to a blessed and ever-growing destiny or future? Let me say that it would be more difficult for me to believe that the grave ends everything than to believe that angels will come for me and whisper to me and promise me a great future of service in the world unseen. Observe, I have to test my faith somewhere; these are the propositions that are made to me. One is that on going into the deep clay-pit you return to nothing. What is the other? By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who tasted death for every man, you may, by belief in Him and love towards Him and service for His sake, you may despise death, you may languish into life, you may say, "O death, where is thy sting? Grave, thy victory?" You can stand up in your last bodily strength, and scorn them, and then pass into the calm and the song of heaven.

Are these the two propositions you make? Yes, these are the two propositions. Then I have given my choice. What is your choice? Christ, immortality, a heaven of growth, service, peace; that is my choice; and I will drink it in sacramental blood, and grasping the bread in the one hand and the cup in the other, I accept this faith and will work it out, so help me God! We must therefore come to some definite elections; we cannot be walking on both sides of the street at once; you cannot serve two masters: Ye cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot be a genteel, sickly, pallid invalid called an intellectual doubter, and a rejoicing and ministering Christian believer. I call upon you this day to make the decision; I ask you to-day to say whom you will serve, God or the devil, spirit or matter, eternity or perishing time.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should create, sustain, redeem everything? Here is a man who has a word to say, and I have always believed that he should be heard. Make your speech. "Well," quoth he, "it stands to reason, you know." Stop! whose reason? A good deal will depend upon that. I should not take you as a model or monument of reason; I should be glad to do so, but my conscience will not allow me. "It stands to reason——" Whose? It may stand to reason, but you must have all reason, the sum total, the perfect unity of reason; then I defy and despise your insinuation. You are talking of reason, and are only representing your own reason; you must add mine to it, and the reason of all the Church to it, and the reason of all the ages to it; and then are you the spokesman of that sum-total reason? Why, you have been talking about your little self—a most interesting little creature for those who have time to bother with you, but I have none. "It stands to reason," forsooth! In God's name, whose reason? I believe in reason, I believe that faith is the higher reason, the translated, inspired, and glorified reason; and I will not allow any man to set his one personal reason against the total reason of centuries and indeed worlds; for this world is many worlds, gathered up into this one little darkness of time.

That is my standing place as a minister. I believe it is easier to defend the faith than to defend doubt or to defend unbelief. I have been all these years standing talking to you from this pulpit, and I am stronger in my faith to-day than I ever was; I am a more positive teacher of positive truth than I ever was in any period of my ministry. I believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God, God the Son, the redeeming, universal, eternal Saviour of the world. More than that: I will not listen to any man who comes to preach about his doubts. He ought to be in the congregation, and not in the pulpit; and if any of you, my brother ministers, want to tell your doubts, I would advise you to tell them in the open air—a well-ventilated place, and an opportunity which any earnest-minded man might covet. I will not bring doubts to your service, I will tell you how God treated me in the darkness, in the valley of the shadow of death. The day after to-morrow will be the anniversary of my Gethsemane. All I can say is that He has not crushed me; there are moments, hours of depression and sadness; and then there are bright risings of the sun, and I hear as it were an added voice in the choir of heaven.

It is hardly too much to say that to-day there is but one subject in the hearts of men. I have referred to the subject in various relations and aspects again and again, and we have united in pleading prayer at the throne of the heavenly grace. After all that has been said on the subject, it may not be amiss to say one word upon it from the Nonconformist point of view. I am not aware that any one has touched upon this particular phase of the theme. There is only one country in which there are any Nonconformists. That country is not Scotland or Ireland or India or Canada or Australia or the West Indies. How, then, did the Nonconformists stand in relation to Queen Victoria, blessed be her spotless name? From their heart of hearts they were intensely reverent and loyal. I have been at many a function, I have attended many a ceremony in the half-century of my ministry, and I have never known the Queen's name received in any Nonconformist assembly except with spontaneous and enthusiastic homage. That is a personal

testimony; my brethren in the pulpit and my brethren in the ministry would say exactly the same thing. Our united and representative testimony is that we have lost a friend, a mother, a Queen, the like of whom never reigned on any earthly throne. We all loved the Queen. Everybody wanted to start the National Anthem when it was hinted at in any public Nonconformist assembly; we never knew there were so many people in the world who could raise a tune, but the moment "God save the Queen!" was suggested, everybody rose and began the familiar strain. The nation loved the Queen, the empire is in tears for her to-day. It will be some little time before we get accustomed to the new order. Many mistakes are made in letters and cheques and in other writings on New Year's Day; the old cannot be cast off for the new in a moment; even practised writers have on New Year's Day inscribed on their documents last year's figures. For a time it may be so with some of us in regard to the change in the Monarchy. We have said "God save the Queen" so long, that it may require a little time before we can say as we will one day say it, God save the King! Long live Edward the Seventh! The new King has great opportunities before him. His first official words and acts will go far to determine his permanent influence in the empire. England was never so educated and so politically and religiously sensitive as to-day. The King can now make this empire his own in a double and an enduring sense. As Prince of Wales he has played a difficult part with striking sagacity and unfailing good nature. He is a man of great compass of mind. Let us welcome him with our kindliest appreciation; let us put no difficulties in his way. Give him to feel that for his mother's sake we bid him welcome, and that for his own sake, and his wife's sake, and his children's sake, we wish him well. In saying this I could almost claim to speak for all denominations and all sects. This is a time in which we forget differences as far as possible, and unite in the recognition of fundamentals and essentials. God save the King! God save the people! Amen.

[*Guildhall, London, Monday, January 28th,* 1901, *inaugurating the Simultaneous Mission.*]

THE Hundredth Psalm having been sung, Dr. Parker said: I cannot allow the service to proceed until I, in the name of all my friends, cordially thank the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor of London and all who are associated with him for permitting the use of this ancient hall for the holding of a distinctively religious service. I do not know that such an event ever occurred before. If I might say so, the environment of the occasion is unique, I believe it is unparalleled in the religious history of modern England. What is that environment? A new century, a new King—God save the King! ("Amen!")—and a religious service in the Guildhall of the sovereign City of the Empire. It will be the fault of the Free Churches, and their fault alone, if this hospitality never be renewed. We have to answer a responsibility; we will answer it in the name of God and in the power of His grace. We are not here in any sectarian capacity. God forbid! With our whole hearts we say, Grace, mercy, and peace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. We shall show, if not by argument, yet by personality and illustration, that we are here to express and uphold the true genius of religious catholicity. I shall utterly fail in my argument and my appeal if I do not prove that the agreements of Christian men are infinitely greater than their differences. Let us pray.

Prayer.

GOD bless London, the great City, wicked and righteous, greatly debased and wondrously exalted; the great miracle and mystery of cities. The Lord look upon London lest she become pestilent as Sodom and have inflicted upon her the vengeance of eternal fire. We bless Thee for all the good men, for all the holy women, for all the heavenly agencies that are at work in this great metropolis; God bless every one, under what ecclesiastical name soever they be conducted in the power of the grace of Christ. Give us a message from heaven, a message from the Cross; may there be the redness of significant blood in all our words, may men take knowledge of all the missioners that they have been with Jesus and have learned of Him, and have brought with them the glow of His own fire. God bless all the churches, bishops, clergy, ministers, men of every name and degree, who are set up to explain and uphold the kingdom of Christ. Thou art bringing great things before us, we know not

what may be next; there is a new emphasis in the cry, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Bless the chief magistrate of the City and all associated with him in municipal office; look upon the whole band of municipalities, and pour the spirit of Thy grace upon all their leaders and representatives. And whilst we are ambitious in the right sense, may we be deeply concerned for the poor, the lost, the out-of-the-way, the unnamed. God save the King! Bless the whole household of royalty, pour out plentifully of the spirit of Thy grace upon King Edward the Seventh.

Hear us, we humbly pray Thee, in these our morning supplications, and fill our hearts with light and peace and joy; seeing that we pray at the Cross, and pray in the all-prevailing name of our one Priest and Intercessor. Amen.

CXXV.

CHRIST AND THE MULTITUDE.

"*When He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion.*"—MATT. ix. 36.

HAT is the deity of the Son of God. When did Jesus Christ see the multitudes? Before there were any multitudes to be seen. That is the mystery of the Gospel of the Cross. We do so belittle the great kingdom, we localise Christ, we make Him a creature or an incident of time, we keep His birthday. Oh! the sadness of it, if it be not fully explained. When did Jesus Christ see the multitudes? Before there were any fountains abounding with water. "Glorify Me with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." It is that "before" that we miss. We insulate the birth of Christ, we do not set Him in eternity. He is a Child of our own day, our own age; we think we see Him all. Have we forgotten the pre-existence of Christ? Do we really and truly recognise the fact that He always existed? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We are such poor scholars, we

can only see things that appeal to the eye. The Word was before the book. Forgetting that, we are troubled on every hand by theological heresies and novelties and upstarts; we do not rest our poor aching heads on the pillow of eternity. Why all this excitement and tumult? why this storm in teacups? why this great panic and fear lest another man should leave what is understood to be the orthodox Church? Let him go! He will return in the degree in which he is sincere; give him time, hope well of him, speak kindly to him. Have no fear for the unsettlement or the disturbance of the kingdom of heaven. It began in eternity, it will go on through everlasting; there is no panic in the Divine personality. God is peace, God gives peace, God gives rest. Do not delegate yourselves to consider what is to be done with this new phase of unbelief or that; keep to the sacred thrilling duty and delight of prayer, study, communion with God, fellowship with the eternal, and soon—no man knows how soon—there may be a trumpet-blast rending the air and announcing that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

"When Jesus saw the multitudes"—all the multitudes, all the world: sights we can never see. These things are to be revealed to us. A man thinks he has seen the world, but no man has seen it; he has gone over certain routes and sea-lines, and he has halted here and there; but the world only God has seen, only God can see. The world is to be revealed to all Christian teachers. We must pray to have some sight of it, at all events, that we may adequately in the power of God address ourselves to this arduous but glorious ministry. Who has seen the multitudes? Who has seen the world? Yet who does not talk about these things, and talk with the fluency of ignorance? Here is a man who is holding a kind of monologue in the king's garden or in some fair place of flowers and fountains, and it is in this strain he talks; that is to say: "It is a beautiful world after all; say what we please, it is an enchanting world; it is most tenderly and delicately beautiful is this much-misunderstood world." How the man prates! Oh, that there were limits to folly! Hear him, and I ask you what coherence is there

in his talk. He is sitting in a garden, and talking about a world. That is folly. His sentence is not the same at the end as it was at the beginning, it breaks down in the matter of coherence and unity. He sees a garden, and delivers judgment on the world! It is so difficult for preaching men to get that idea driven into men's minds. The repetition of these words may not be unprofitable. "Let the preachers say what they like," is the foolish monologue, "this world, after all, is right beautiful, it is a charming place to live in; look at the rising sun and the setting sun, and look at all the seasons in their beautiful regular musical movements." These people are talking about a section of the world as if it were the whole globe. Only God can see the world. Have you read "'Lisa of Lambeth"? I have; in one respect, it is the most revolting book written in these modern times, but in another sense it is literally, tragically, horribly true. Have you read "Tales of Mean Streets"? Condescend to do that, if you please, and you will be the better and the sweeter of heart by a religious perusal of these records. Will you go with me in imagination to Lambeth? What are these people signalling to one another about? what does the bent finger mean? what does the closed eye signify? what do certain sounds and expressions convey? I will tell you: they mean that the coast is clear, that the rooms upstairs are ready, and that youths who are in that hell of life which goes from seventeen to thirty years of age, may go up and drink with the devil. This can be done in daylight. Once it was a shy devil we had to deal with, for he waited at least till the lamps were lit; now he walks abroad at mid-day. These things are going on in our own London, and many of us do not know it.

I am reminded of the old King Ahasuerus who laid down this law; hear him: "None that wore sackcloth might enter into the king's gate." What an ostrich fool! He covered his head up as he pleased that he might escape ugly sights, and he took care not to inhale noisome savours. He was not ignorant of the fact that there was sackcloth, but this was his policy—and is our policy.

Ahasuerus in this respect is the living Londoner. Ahasuerus said: If there is any sackcloth, I do not want to see it; remember that, and arrange accordingly; if (to modernise the expression) there are very distressing and ghastly things occurring in the streets, avoid those streets, and take me round by some other way; if there are tragedies in the newspapers, do not let me hear about them; if anybody is broken-hearted, I do not want to hear his miserable whine: bring me the delights of the sons of men, musical instruments of all sorts; fill my table with flowers, stock the palace with all things lovely and beautiful, and let me walk in the enchanted palace of dreams; and as for the sackcloth, and the leprous, and those who are altogether objectionable, I do not want to see them, keep them away from me. Is that an old story? Just as old as this noonday, not one moment older, except in the sense that we are confirming all that we read about these kings and politicians who want to keep evil sights out of their own eye-line and want to be fed with dainties and cheered and delighted with all things musical and floral, and who when a poor child would cry, stop their ears that the poignant cry may not be heard. These men will never save the world; they have no conception of the genius of salvation. We, Churches and Christians of all denominations, ought to know the facts. We are afraid of facts, and if some frank-hearted, daring man were to stand up on this red-carpeted platform at this moment and tell us the facts, we would turn away from him, hiss him, leave him, and call ourselves Christians. We are not Christians, if we can do so, we are baptised infidels, we are consecrated traitors.

Now how did Jesus Christ look upon all these things? There is one verse in the New Testament that ought to comfort everybody whenever he reads it; this is the effect of it: "And they brought unto Him all that were sick and diseased and blind and halt and leprous, and He healed them." That is our Ahasuerus, that is our Jesus, that Man will save the world if it costs Him the blood of His heart. When Jesus saw the multitudes, He did see them, He walked amongst them, He spake their mother-tongue, they understood Him, He was heard by the common people

gladly. They never said of Him, "How polished His style! how exceedingly classical! how cumulative the climaxes! with what beautiful architectural order the whole discourse was laid out!" They never said so, they had no time to think of that kind of criticism; when they came away from Him they said, "Never man spake like this Man." He found the way into the heart; He touched our tears, and lo! when we looked for them they were gone. He understood us, He called us son, daughter, and He said that we might all be saved. Come, Lord Jesus, come again; even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly! We want Thyself in great spiritual impression and conviction, if not in the figure that this poor vision can discern.

How, then, does the case stand? When Jesus saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion. Ministers, may I, by right of age, venture for a moment to say that your preaching will do no good if it is not, so to say, saturated with compassion? It is pity that finds the heart. I must have in my preacher a man who understands my life, who can lower his voice into a healing whisper, and yet who can denounce unrighteousness as with the voice of a whirlwind; I must feel that he is speaking to me. He never saw me, yet he speaks to me. This is the very mystery of the ministry of Jesus Christ. He who preaches to broken hearts preaches to the times. That is the lesson I would venture to give to my juniors; not the man who is answering something that nobody in the congregation has ever read, but the man who says, "I know you are weary and darkened and burdened and crushed and heavy-laden, and I can give you through the power of Christ the rest for which you pine." That is grand preaching, it is full of tears, and yet they are the tears of a strong man. There is a difference in tears. There are tears that may be merely sentimental weakness: but I know when a giant cries, I know by the grip of his hand that he is strong enough not to be afraid to shed tears when he is talking to broken hearts and blighted lives.

What, then, did Jesus Christ say? He said, They

are "as sheep having no shepherd." That is a new idea of human life and human society. We must have shepherds, we must have leaders; the question is not whether we shall have clergy and bishops and ministers and all the clerical order; we cannot help it. How is that? Because we need guidance, we are in perplexity, we want this entanglement to be unravelled, and we say, Is there no prophet in Israel? Is there no one, at least some poor dead Samuel, who could be brought back in some form? We will go into superstition if we do not rise into faith: take your choice. We must have teachers, men who have the golden key, men who know the right word and know how to speak it. The world, since Biblical history began, has never wanted such men; they have always been there, they are God's creation, they are intellectual and spiritual miracles. If some of us are sneered at as preachers, we must remember the Master. If they sneered at the Master, will they spare the servant? Then, remember, nothing is so easy and so cheap as to sneer at somebody else; there is no genius in it, it is not worth doing. Young preachers, young missioners, do not be afraid of sneering people; they never saved the world, and they never will save it. Do not take your line of ministry or your tone of conduct from such people. Keep close to the Master; hug His right hand with both of yours; if you open it to look at it, it is to see the ruby of a wound. You are safe, mighty, as you keep to Jesus.

What follows? "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest." Have we understood that passage? Some have, and have profited richly by it. "Pray"? Yes, pray: but understand what "pray" means. If we may figure the occasion, they all fell to their knees, and they prayed the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth labourers into His harvest; and when they had risen from their knees—this is the matter, do not slight this point, it is *the* point—He called them to Him, and said "Go." But we have been praying that somebody else might go. Yes, that is not prayer, that is the chatter of ignorance. If a man has really prayed for starving and lost people he will be only too

glad to be permitted to answer his own prayer, and he will go. Why, that would revolutionise all the churches! That is exactly what the churches want—to be revolutionised, to be mad with the madness of Christ's sanity. We are dying of indifference. And as ye go, Jesus continued, preach, teach, heal the sick; be doctors, as well as preachers: go! Now I could imagine some benevolent soul calling a meeting in Lombard-street—let us pronounce the word with cautious and reverential emphasis—calling a meeting around a table to pray that the Lord would send somebody else into Great Saffron Hill and into Leather Lane and all the streets whose names you know as well as I do; and then they would think they had had a prayer-meeting. My lords, no! You may—I put the matter thus cautiously—you may have to go yourselves. "Well, but I could sit at this table, and multiply millions by millions." It is a poor trick, it may be only the most respectable of the knaveries. Go! "But I am a banker." Go! "But I have great financial responsibilities." Go! "It is so easy for me as a millionaire to pray that the Lord would send out this year five hundred missionaries at one hundred pounds a year apiece. Why, that prayer would take nothing out of me; that prayer would leave me just entire, not a hair of my head would be moved, not a pore of my skin would be opened; why, I could do all that kind of praying without the shedding of blood." And yet that is the true Christianity and the true sacrifice. "Well, but it is a terrible doctrine: could I not make money and send somebody else." You could do that, but it would be a poor thing to do. Shall it be ever heard in this great London that twenty bankers are all going out by ship to endeavour to tell distant and benighted nations that Jesus Christ died for the whole world? Can that ever be? has the age of miracles really ceased?—I mean the age of spiritual miracles, marvels of the soul. Hear me; I shall have no more chance to speak to you. Can that, and that, be, as the preacher has said—that men should leave all they have, and go out at Christ's bidding? That is what they used to do in the good old time. Jesus said unto them, Leave your ships, and follow Me. And they left them. It is such easy reading, but such difficult

doing. But the world, especially the City of London, could not do without us, and our great commercial responsibilities and aptitudes and our statesmanlike minds. Perhaps not: but the City of London has done without a good many people, and it may be able to do without us; it is a sad reflection, but it is the kind of discouragement which if properly taken turns into inspiration: for now is the accepted time, this is the noon opportunity of labour. And the Lord only sends us to pray that we may be sent to answer our own prayers. "That is a new doctrine." It is not. When I went to an early ministry, I had to call upon a very wealthy man to pray, and he prayed that God would bless the poor. And when he was done I said, "Now you have got ten pounds in your pocket, give it to the poor, and make your prayer a reality." He thought that it was personal. Many sermons are void by generality. Do condescend upon the occasion. How fruitful a ministry it would be! At first, very unpopular, but I feel more and more that our pews have got to be emptied before they can be truly filled. "Oh!" you say, "you are getting done with it, and you can speak these bold truths now; but we younger men——" You have courage enough if you will trust to Christ, if you will give up all for Christ, if you will leave the ship and the bank and the office for Christ, at Christ's bidding; you can do it. This is a young man's world. The old men seem to have had their day. Some of us are loth to leave the sphere we have known so long. There wants in this new century a new spirit, a new life, and that will mean a new organisation, and a new policy. You cannot machine or engineer the kingdom of heaven. We want inspired men. It is God that sends. "But I thought that we were called upon to send." Nothing of the kind, it is quite an illusion on your part. "But I understood that the seniors, the elders, the leaders, and other chiefs were to meet in solemn conclave, and say, 'Now, whom shall we send?'" That is blasphemy; there is only one counsel upon that question. "Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?" You cannot put down a God-sent man. If God has sent him, He will bring him back again

with sheaves and rejoicing. It is not for me to say, "Well, about this young man I am really not quite persuaded." Silence, if you please. It is God that sends ministers, that makes them, that inspires them, and qualifies them; it is God. My friend, if God has sent you, take no more heed of public or personal criticism; be modest with the modesty that belongs to divine vocation; carry your burden with such dignity as you may in your weakness be capable of. The Lord will not diminish the burden, He will strengthen the back that bears it.

O friends, mighty men, all these brothers, famed for doing good and for good ideas and noble conceptions, come out, and make the new century new with the true newness, the newness which belongs to eternity. The moss is very old—the daisy that is peeping out of it is this year's child. It is thus we combine the ancient and the modern, the everlasting and the temporary, the eternal and the transient. It is a wondrous ministry and economy of things. I want to know what more I can do in this ministry, God help me. So do my brethren on the right hand and on the left, they want to do better and more than they have ever done. I know them to be strong men, honest, intelligent, sympathetic, sincere; I love them all, I know most of them personally. But let me tell you about this matter of regular and regulation preaching, that the pulpit is largely made in many of its aspects by the pew. You can make any king on the throne; you can create an atmosphere that will develop him or poison him. It is the same with preaching; let the preacher feel that you have come for the bread of life, and you will have it. I heard of a young friend, just as good as anybody could be at his age, who called out in his little pulpit, "Ye men of science!" when there was not a man of science within a mile of the chapel. If he had said, "Ye broken hearts, ye struggling lives, ye crushed and blighted fellow-pilgrims of mine, here is a message from God for you," everybody would have listened with the heart, and when the heart listens the sermon is always most profitable.

Prayer.

BLESSED be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which hath begotten us again to a lively hope through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Death has been abolished in Christ. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? We know that our Redeemer liveth; it is so written in our souls by the unseen finger of God; we know it by a great knowledge deeper than all letters, far away beyond all things we call visible. In God there is no death; we live in God, our lives are hid in Christ with God; we have no fear of death, because the sting has been taken away. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death; we leave the last enemy with our Father. Thou wilt see us safely through the fight and the tumult and the darkness of the last valley. Thou hast great welcomes for us in that land; on these promises our souls feed and grow strong. Thou hast not left us to famish without food; in our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare. May we be in the Lord Christ, then we shall never die; may we live in Christ, then shall we live as He lives, and as long and as triumphantly. Deliver us from all self-help in this great matter; give us that perfect faith which rests on the Holy Word. We bless Thee for the Word that is as a rock under our feet and as a sun in the great firmament; we will have none other, it is enough, it is the music of the Divine love. Now all the air is chilled by death; yet the warmth will come, the deliverance is at hand, we shall see Thy providences from a right point of view; then shall we glorify Thee in manifold and unceasing song. If any poor heart is reminded to-day of a battle well fought but momentarily lost, the Lord come with healing and with sweet and most tender joy. If this be a day of gladness to some, the Lord's sunshine is the morning of the soul, may they rejoice in its light and thank God for a new benediction. Wilt Thou in Thy tender mercy visit the houses that are in mourning and that sit in weariness and bitterness of heart because of great loss, sudden or long expected. Wilt Thou regard us as a nation. We bless Thee for the monarch who has ascended; we commend to Thy care and love the monarch who has just been proclaimed The Lord be gracious unto all the people and exceedingly comfort them whose hearts are cast down. The Lord look upon us here and now, there and then, wheresoever we be, knowing that we are still looking to the Cross and trusting to the priesthood of the Son of God; and in this confidence we say Amen.

CXXVI.

MODES OF DEATH.

HOW many ways are there of dying so far as the Holy Scriptures teach us the working of that dread but comfortable mystery? It is not enough to say, "All men die." That may be trite enough: but how do some men die? How many ways are there of passing through the one gate? Where is the poetry of the whole idea? There is a ghostly side to death, there is also another and better side. It may be edifying for us to discover some of the features of the variety of ways by which men pass from this to that, this cloud to that light; in how many ways does God break the mask and show the living face. We live amidst glooms and shadows and masks, and are continually being victimised and betrayed by the very senses of whose acuteness we often too thoughtlessly boast.

"He died." That is not enough; that is a mere announcement without atmosphere and poetic colour and suggestion. "All men die." So do all dogs; I must have more than that, we must go into secrets and holy mysteries and even patent varieties, so that we may know something about this aspect of the divine and redeeming providence. Why are we so rough in our generalisations? Why will we miss the daylight? Why do we not call a hush in the chambers of the soul, that we may hear the softer music, the beseeching and pleading tones? What if we collate some instances, and study this mystery in their light? That may be profitable. Biblical history is before us, a great gallery has been opened to the soul's vision: what if we look awhile and try to read the small print?

Here is a great man whose end is at hand. Everybody knows it, he knows it, hardly anyone says a word about it, yet everyone is perfectly sure

of it. How will he go? Will he stretch himself out upon some bank of flowers, and die like a proud and satisfied king? Not so. The sun often dies on his couch of gold quite visibly and almost ostentatiously. This man will have something better than a couch of gold. Hear his talk; it is a ripe voice, there is more in it than sound. "If thou see me when I am taken from thee." Is that the mystery? Yes, that is the mystery in this particular case. "When I am taken from thee." Death is a sense of personal separation. The two men had become one, old age and comparative youth had agreed between themselves, and were expounding a common love. Perhaps it was the very gentlest thing that could be said: "When I am taken from thee." That event happeneth unto all, but to some it happens more acutely than to others. There has been such a long companionship, such an interchange of thought and feeling and service, that the two life-streams are one glad river. Then comes the taking away, the picking out, so to say, of the one stream from the other, thus narrowing and belittling it and turning it into a song of sighs. Yet how quiet it is! there is no violence, there is no sound of rupture; there is a mysterious, deep, and ever-deepening silence that is all significant, that is spent music, so stunned, that for the moment it cannot beat or throb or even sigh. It did not look like death at first; the chariot came and the horses of fire, and the great prophet stepped into the chariot and was carried away. But with Elisha the sense was that of being taken from his heart; his heart had lost something, lost its own noble self. There is no record of his silence, there are some things that cannot be reported: who can find words for emptiness, desolation, orphanage? We can find words about them, but never can we find words equivalent to them, fully and adequately expressing the whole agony, and the tears unshed.

There is a still more striking instance in which this word took or take is used. It is in the case of a man who walked with God, a man who had but one Companion. How did he depart this life? Is it not enough to say that he did depart this life? It is not, we want to know something about the way, the

method, the atmosphere, the poetic significance and spiritual thrill. Well, I will tell you: "He was not; for God took him." So did Enoch vanish from the sight of men. How pregnant with tender suggestion is the picture! Enoch walked with God, and one day they were so near heaven that God put him inside. It is possible so to walk with God that there shall be no dying,—just breathing, perhaps the ghost of a sigh that struggles to be a song. It was right beautiful, it was a picture to hang in the chambers of the memory and to look at many a time when the heart was sad. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should be able to take His creatures into heaven by ten thousand different ways? Did He not make all the ways? Did He not set up the heavens in all their splendour and quiet magnificence? Did He not make the heart of man? Does He not know how to stop the throb of that heart? Leave all with God. We may have to go through violently, there may be a sad tragical fight with this wasting body, it may be obstinate to the last, it may be a vengeful body, saying, You shall fight for your release, I will keep you as long as you can be kept; you will have to struggle hard, and lose blood in the fight, and, apparently at least, be utterly overthrown. Amen; so be it; it is a hard way, but it may be a way, and a way to a palace, even the very city of God. It is not for us to choose our way. Perhaps most of us have some fancy way along which we should like to travel to that city celestial. Probably that fancy will be exactly the way contrary to the one God has determined upon. I should like to die at my work. You also have a way which you would like God to adopt. There could be no such place for a preacher to die in as in this pulpit. It well befits the mariner that he should die at sea. But all these things are in the hands of God. He knows what is best, and will work it all out in love. Only He is so long about it! We say this as if we could measure time. It is another instance of our fretful folly.

These are ghostly ways of withdrawing men from the ordinary paths of life—the chariot of fire, and the intaking of God whilst the door of heaven seems to

almost suddenly open. Is there any other figure set forth in the Bible by which this ministry of death is accomplished? Yes. One man said a beautiful thing about it which I often say in the August and September months:—"Like a shock of corn fully ripe." That is more homely, that figure brings the whole case very closely to our eyes and to our hearts. How long do you want a shock of corn to stand out in the cooling fields when all the rest of the harvest is gathered in? It seems as if some of us were left out like solitary sheaves that have no business to be out. Poetise and symbolise the fact, and here is a sheaf of corn spending the night alone; the loaded wains have all been driven home, and this poor solitary sheaf does not like the night when its company has gone on before. "It is such a midnight, such a cold night, such an inexplicable night," quoth the solitary sheaf. "Why am I left out? I can grow no more; I can only, if left out in the bitter weather, rot and perish. Why this sullen loneliness?" I find a letter on my table this morning written in a most beautiful hand, fluent, perfectly legible, and having a most religious air, both in its words and in its purpose. Says my white-haired, much-wrinkled friend, "I am ninety years of age; I want you to help me in a work in which I am engaged. I have given five pounds myself, and if spared I hope to make it up to a hundred." It is a loving letter, and it is signed, "John Spurgeon," the father of the founder of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He is a shock of corn fully ripe, and yet there is not one single word about old age. It did me good; it was my preliminary service of the morning. For I had imagined and persuaded myself that I was at least 190 years old, and here is my most venerable and ever-affectionate friend looking as cheerful, as bright as ever I saw any picture look, and he made me feel that I had hardly begun my work. Thus men help one another. We cannot tell what we are doing when we are writing a friendly note of love to some other poor heart. There are mountains that make the other hills look very small; so there are temperaments and personalities that cheer the world and make it young. If I were called upon to find a

metaphor that would fitly match the figure of a shock of corn fully ripe, it would be a summer sunset, June's best gold and purple and amber and all the gathered colours intershaded and wrought up into an apocalypse of beauty, a very way, an open way, into waiting heaven. So we may be gathered as a shock of corn fully ripe, or we may pass away like the great, good, never-to-be-forgotten Queen passed away, like the setting of the sun. Suns do not set to die, they set to rise. So shall it be with this sunsetting and sunrising of what we call the dream, the drama, the revolution of life.

Can there be found in the New Testament any figure that signifies the inner colour and deeper purpose of this mystery of passing hence? Having studied the life of Paul, have we not sometimes wondered how he would finish? How could such a man get away? He had so much upon his hands—the care of all the churches; how could he be spared? The time came, and the answer came with it. Said he, "I have finished my course." What a satisfaction not to be broken off in the middle, not to be a broken column in some secret cemetery, but to have completed the work, to have added the last stone, to have given the last artistic touch, to be able to say, "It is finished, I can do no more; if I were to stay I should only stay to be forgotten; let me go whilst I know I am going. Do not prolong the melancholy, because after this point I should only waste and fade and become feebler and feebler, until I, before whom men rose because they recognised my strength, could be nothing but a crushed reed; I have finished, let me go!" Did the same apostle say anything else about this matter? He did. He said, "I have fought a good fight." We have corrected this translation before, it is worth being correctly translated many times. Not "I have fought a good fight," as who should say, "Behold me if you want to see a warrior: none ever struck as I struck, none had my lion heart; I have fought a good fight." That would be a poor little speech. What, then, did the apostle say? He spake like himself—a great, noble, revelation speech he made. "I have

fought the good fight "—the same fight you are fighting, the common fight. I have not been engaged in a little struggle on my own account, I have entered into the great antagonism, the holy way, and God has seen me through the entire fray. So one man is taken away in a chariot of fire ; another man is taken away because he has done a soldier's work and finished his course with conscientiousness, energy, and completeness ; another is taken away like a shock of corn fully ripe. This difference in the method or mode of death is recognised in the Old Testament. "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet ; another dieth in the bitterness of his soul, and never eateth with pleasure." So then the difference of mode is recognised. You will find that the Bible builds itself upon great facts. The Bible is more than a dream ; it is a temple whose foundation is a rock. How delightful and how profitable to deal with a Book which knows our nature, our habits, our whole constitution, and that can address itself immediately to our personal necessities ! That Book is God's Book.

Now Paul once more. He said, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you." "To die is gain"—in the great broad sense of the word. Not gain to the little individuality, but gain to the cause. Some men complete their argument when they breathe their last. We have to wait until the great reasoner, advocate, propagandist dies to get the full benefit of his personality and his advocacy. Some men have wrought greater wonders in their death than in their lives. This is a great mystery. But the historic record is before us for proof and for illustration. The apostle did not care much how it came, he was more interested in the fact that it should come. He used to talk a little bit about his body sometimes, and he said once, "If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved"—what does it come to, what is the real issue of the matter ?—"we have an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Dissolution, resurrection, that is the great Christian programme. If any poor soul here is not a partaker of that economy of

things, well, it is a sad case. He may laugh and sneer at what he does not understand. There is no sneer so intolerable as the sneer of ignorance. If the poor sneerer really knew the case he would be one of the first to pray and to work for the very cause he despises. This is a great mystery; it is in some senses a most horrible and ghastly mystery, but it is a fact. Some men have not the gift of music; you could palm off any air upon them. Ought they to be consulted in musical matters? If they sneer, ought the true music to be discouraged? It is even so with the Christian faith. There are men who are incapable to all human appearance—I stretch my statement no further—of understanding or receiving the Gospel; their ears cannot hear, their hearts are hardened. Some explanation is to come, God will be justified, for God is love; but here and now, within most narrow and treacherous limits, there are men whom it seems to be absolutely impossible to persuade that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to save sinners. It is very disheartening to preach to such people. On the other hand, we ought to take the larger view. Jesus Christ pitied them and preached to them and did what He could for them; in one case, indeed, it is written, "He could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." A tumbler of water cannot receive an Atlantic liner.

I have done away, you will be glad to hear, with the voluntary which is known as the Dead March this morning. I have had enough of that, I can have no more of it for a long time. This is a critical and sensitive hour for me. I want something other than that. Sing "I know that my Redeemer liveth," or "O rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him," or something of that kind. I have come to dread and to detest at certain times and under certain conditions the Dead March from the great oratorio *Saul*. It is a magnificent conception, only a supreme genius could have written that Dead March; but the valley is so cold, and I am so ill provided with garments, that I cannot again pass through that drear line. The offering which is now to be taken is an offering of love from those who believe that death is swallowed up in victory.

Closing Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou art the God of nations. All the earth is Thine, and Thou rulest over all in tender mercy. At this time we gather at Thy footstool to thank Thee for Thy loving-kindness long continued to Queen Victoria of England. We bless Thee for her memory; there is no dark day of shame in all her wondrous reign. We bless Thee for her beauty of character, her benevolence of soul, and her wonderful devotion to duty. We commend unto Thee her successor, her son, and say with united hearts, God save the King! May he be known for his love of righteousness, his love of peace, and his desire to bring into wise reconciliation forces that are disastrously opposed one to another. The Lord's blessing be upon all the lands, and may there be a common feeling all over the world that we belong to one another, and that, being sons of God, through Christ Jesus, we are brothers all over the globe. The Lord hear us, and give us light, peace, and prosperity all our days. Amen.

May grace, mercy, peace, the threefold blessing of the Triune God, abide with us until we see the meaning of all things in the light of heaven's morning. Amen.

SUNDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 10TH, 1901.

Voluntary .. "Andante Pastorale" .. *Duncan*

Anthem 9 .. "The heavens proclaim Him" .. *Beethoven*

The Lord's Prayer.—*Hawkins.*

Hymn 1 .. "O worship the King."

1st Lesson. Jer. xxxii. 17-19.

Chant 9 .. "Te Deum Laudamus" .. .. *Monk*

2nd Lesson. Heb. i. 8-12.

Anthem .. .. "Gloria" (*Twelfth Mass*) *Mozart*

Prayer.

Hymn 660 "O God of Love, O King of Peace."

Sermon.

Offertory and Solo:

"The ninety and nine" .. .. *Campion*

MISS LUCIE JOHNSTONE.

Hymn 401 .. "Soldiers of Christ, arise."

Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod*

Voluntary .. .. "March" .. *Arthur Berridge*

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou art the God of the fields and the gardens and the vineyards. All these are part of Thy revelation; Thou preachest Thy gospels through them as well as through hearts and consciences and lives. Thou art the God of the garden. Thou dost come to look for fruit, and if there be none Thou dost wither the tree away. Thou wilt not allow uselessness; Thou dost seek fruit: may fruit abound in our lives through the mighty power of the Holy Ghost. May we remember that we have read of the fruit of the Spirit, may we be careful about fruit, about spiritual issue and usefulness; may we abound in fruit, though we may have to be much pruned, even severely cut and wounded by Thine own knife; may we accept the discipline that we may bring forth the fruit. Herein is our Father glorified, that we bear much fruit. Christ is the Vine, we are the branches; may we glorify the God of the vineyard by bringing forth plentifulness of acceptable wine. Thou hast planted us in a goodly place, our heritage is fair, the lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; God forbid that after all we should be unfruitful, having nothing to show for all the divine tillage and culture and tender care. The Lord help us to be more than ornamental, to be useful, fruitful, always abounding in the work of the Lord: thus shall we begin heaven upon earth, thus shall we begin to taste even in time the sweets of immortality.

We pray in the name of Jesus, without whose name there is no prayer. May the Intercessor take up our few pleas, sanctifying them with His blood, and making them prevalent by His own intercession. The Lord hear us, and the divine hearing shall be as a divine answer! Amen.

CXXVII.

THE POET OF HORTICULTURE.

I.

"*They shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.*"—ISAIAH xliv. 4.

S this an isolated passage? has the prophet by some kind of hapchance lighted upon the figure? What a misconception of the whole prophecy it would be to say that this is a single parable, one solitary figure, without match or counterpart! If people would study the Biblical books in their unity, how much steadier would be our piety, how much more constant and fruitful our service! Have you read the book of Isaiah with the intention to gather its main parables into one holy picture that turns the whole prophecy into a beautiful garden?

What is the prophet Isaiah? Given this book to understand what his occupation is or his hobby at home, what should we say the man was? I think, a gardener, a horticulturist. He cannot let that figure alone. We talk about ministers repeating themselves, this prophet repeats himself whenever he can by bringing in the forest or the willows, the gardens, the blossoms, and the roses. I never knew such a man in his position in life for horticulture. He is the poet of the garden; he turns the trees into parables; he is really never so much his very own self as when he gets hold of the parable of garden and forest, tree and abounding fruit. He can hardly open his great prophecy, in some respects the greatest of all the prophecies, without bringing in the garden. Even in the first chapter and no later than the eighth verse he shows his hand: "And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers." Every man has a key to his books; if

you once get the key the books are yours; you know whether he is philosopher or poet, you know when he lifts his telescope what he is, and you also know what he is when he asks you to come into the garden and look on some new flowers that he has there. Every man has a hobby, every man is something; beautiful is it when a man can take you where beauty grows or where music sings, and can say, These are my parables of the kingdom of God. That is joy, that is wealth, that is a great city of the mind, a city of the soul, into which a man can retire when the wind is too stormy outside and all things darken as under the frown of a cloud. "A cottage in a vineyard"—why, that is a poem? Precisely so. That is what God's kingdom is, whether represented in great or in small type and figure. "A lodge in a garden"—is that typical of sweet heaven? Is it so they live who have gone above these poor climates? And is it by such metaphor we are to catch a glimpse of what the whole earth might be? And yet all this might be associated with desolateness. What is the use of the cottage when the vineyard itself is ice? Of what comfort is the lodge when through all its little windows we can see nothing but the ravages of plague? The Lord's intention is that we should occupy the cottage, and enjoy the fruit of the vineyard, be the occupants of the lodge, and enjoy the cucumbers of the garden.

The prophet cannot get even out of his first chapter without another reference to his occupation. A poet should live in a garden; a painter, a poet, a happy preacher, should live where the flowers are handy. So Isaiah says in chapter i. 30, "Ye shall be as an oak whose leaf fadeth, and as a garden that hath no water." Oh the horribleness of it, the paradox, the awful contradiction!—a garden, and no water! Many men represent that state of things; they have beautiful outlines; they have nominal blessings; the architecture is perfect, but the garden which ought to have been a blossom is a wilderness. It is not a wilderness in process of becoming a garden, that is a most excellent process; it is a garden in process of becoming a wilderness. That is the terrible part of it, and is represented by

so many men in every audience. They are men who want to live in circumstance, and God has so ordained His providence that He will not allow us to live long or really prosperously in externals. Have we sufficiently thought of that? Our bread is to be eaten at a secret table, we are to have bread to eat that the world knoweth not of, the water is to be in us springing up into everlasting life. Oh for that indwelling spring, for that inward, spiritual, inexhaustible fountain, that comes up out of the rocks, and throws its gleaming, refreshing waters as a blessing for all who are thirsty. Has your garden any water? How soon does the gardener complain of want of water? We accost him with the congratulation that the rain has been plentiful, and almost before we have time to pay him a second visit he thrusts his spade into the soil and says, "We are greatly in need of rain now." You and I thought there was rain enough within the last fortnight to have kept the garden going for the whole year, but we forget the wondrous ministry of evaporation, night and day the water may be going back to the clouds it came from. Oh, who thinks of the necessity of daily renewal and almost daily shower—a constant softening and enriching of the things which are planted in the soil? Thus heaven's rain co-operates with earth's chemistry, and the two together present us with bud and blossom and final fruit. See to it that your garden has water. I have heard of you going after the garden; you have left the poor old minister in the middle of the town or city because you wanted a place where there is a garden. You have never inquired about the spiritual ministries of the locality—never. You have found the garden, the meadow, the ornamental landscape, the beautiful retreat: what about the water, the better water, the inner water, the water of eternal life? There may not be a man or a church within accessible distance where a word can be heard that comes throbbingly from heaven and immediately from the heart of God. O man, think first of the water supply, the divine gift, and be sure that wherever you settle, when you are looking among all the advertisements for a freehold residence with a large garden, do not forget to ask how near the church is, the altar, the

apostolic voice, the incense from heaven. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these little incidentals, such as the garden and the meadow, will be added to you, if they are of any real consequence to your best life in the esteem of God.

Now Isaiah, this poet of horticulture, makes a little parable. Hitherto a little sentence has been enough, now he will go into parables. I love to hear him talk, let me hear his parable now. He calls it a song; a parable and a song may be the same thing. "Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes" (ch. v. 1-2). So vineyards may be disappointing. We must not live in the nominal, in the ornamental; we must inquire about the fruitfulness, the reality, that which bears upon the enrichment and uplifting of spiritual life. An awful thing this, and most ghastly,—a vineyard in a very fruitful hill, where there ought to have been nothing but vines, every vine fruitful to overloadedness, so that the branches would be borne down by the luscious load; and there is a tower in it, and a winepress in it, and everything that mortal man could do for the vineyard has been done; ay, and beyond that, everything that the loving God could do has been done; and the vineyard is a desolation! So have I seen men rot who had nothing but wealth. Wealth will rot any man if he have not something more golden than gold; then let him have all the gold he needs. Gold sanctified is a blessing, gold dedicated on the altar to the service of poverty and weakness is a wonderful gift of God. I have seen a man at his own marble mantelpiece, with a great glowing fire in the polished grate, so afflicted with decay that he could not rise to receive me when I entered his room; his disposition was right, but he had exhausted himself. That is the way with nature; she is most penal, she comes in with her account, lays it down, and waits for payment, and pay we must. Nature is very austere? If you put that to me in

the form of a question, I say, Nature is most austere and exacting. We need not dream about a day of judgment far away, a great white throne beyond the mountains and the seas of time; all that is most spiritually true in these parables we can find here and now. I have seen a man rot into his grave, so that the grave had next to nothing to do with him when it engulfed his carcase. Oh that we should have this record, that we were well planted in a beautiful hill, in a sunny climate, and when the planter came to seek fruit, behold, we had nothing to offer him but wild grapes! The man to whom I refer now was mighty to drink wine. "Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink!" Woe unto the men that live on other lives, that try to make themselves happy by making other men miserable! What shall become of them? O thou poet of the garden and the wheatfield and the vineyard, tell me with the eloquence of thine own poetry! So Isaiah tells us in chapter v. 24: "Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their roots shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust." Do not think we can evade God; do not suppose that we can do what we like with the vineyard of our own life, and then when the time comes for us to surrender the lease that we can do so on our own terms. Here is a blossom, a most beautiful dream in softness and colour and fragrance, ground into dust and thrown away. What a lot for a man's life! God expected him to bring forth fruit, and much fruit, and He would have honoured him with a still larger and finer vineyard, and, behold, the blossom, when it was plucked, was but a smudge in the hand, was but a series of particles of dust. To think of living a life of nothingness, and living it in a vineyard; to think of prostituting a garden into a bed of wickedness, and inhaling fragrance that we may turn it back into bad breath, which we breathe upon the summer air! Oh, it is too awful; yet that may be the fact, and woe to the minister of Christ who attempts to smooth things over and tell lies in holy tones and sacred phrases!

Is this all the prophet has to say about his vine-

yard subject? Far from it. I will hear him now in another tone:—"There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots" (ch. xi. 1). Here is progress, here is the larger kingdom, here is the conversion of the wilderness into the garden of the Lord. "In that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely." Why? Because the Branch out of Jesse has come; history has gone forward, the prophesied One is now on the earth; His footprints are gardens, He looks the bare earth into coloured blossoms, He breathes upon the air and thrills it into music. So we have both sides; there was the disappointing vineyard, then there comes the rich, fruitful Branch, and that Branch shall by its own fruitfulness turn the fruit of the whole earth into fruit that is excellent and comely. There are regenerative forces in the world, there are ministries that make base things into good things. We cannot arrest those ministries; for a moment or two we may appear to hinder them, but the Lord works and will work; for He hath redeemed the earth with blood, and He will make it glorious with the gold of heaven. All through the ancient books Somebody was always coming. That is, so to say, the way the Bible has been kept alive. We read about the coming One, the Prophet of the Lord, the Man of whom Moses was but the antetype; we read of the seed of the woman, we read of the brighter day, and we cannot bring the earth to a conclusion until we give this wondrous prophecy scope for fulfilment. That fulfilment may take place to-day, to-morrow; all that the Bible tells us about it in its very highest eloquence is this, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." We have to work in the spirit of that assurance. The whole scheme of things is built upon assumptions. Assumptions may be the bases of reality; dreams may be the protoplasm of history. It is thus that we have been sung-to and rocked in a cradle of our earliest experiences, being told, as only a mother's voice could tell it, that presently things would be like summer, most beautiful to look at, most fragrant to inhale; and when we have asked the mother-leaders of the world, When shall these things be? they have answered,

"The kingdom of heaven is at hand." We are trained and inspired by expectancy.

The prophet has no more metaphors about the garden? Yes, he has; in fact, the prophet has hardly begun yet. He uses this metaphor both for the explanation of things that are desolate and things that are fruitful. The word of the Lord is as a two-edged sword, and this parable about the garden is as a two-edged instrument for the cutting-down of all badness and rottenness. "It shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm." Just a poor little harvest, a thing you can carry home without any difficulty at all; it is quite "thin"—a well-chosen word in this Authorised Version. The harvest is thin, skinny, mean; a man just steps out of his house, puts his arms round it, and takes it in, saying to himself in scornful tones, This is a kind of harvest not worth gathering. Then in a few more verses there is a "Yet." Have you collated in some useful memorandum book the "yets" of the Bible? You would have been very rich if you had collated all the "yets." Take this one: "Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches." Twos and threes, fours and fives; but they are symbolic numbers, they are hostages, they are the pledges of God. So it will be with all great churches, movements, policies; the whole thing, as we call it, will appear to go to pieces, and we shall say, "There is none left," and the Lord will tell us that there are two or three berries, and we reply in our weariness, "Lord, where are they?" and the Lord answers, "In the uppermost boughs, and there are four or five berries in the outmost fruitful branches." This is the Gospel in the seventeenth chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. Desolation,—yet is not this a microcosm, is it not a little world giving a great outlook? Who can calculate the value of these two or three berries in the uppermost boughs? They prove that the tree is not dead, they prove life; it is a great feat in the highest logic.

Is it not so with some of us? We are sometimes self-afflicted, self-condemned; we dare not look at

ourselves, we are choked in prayer, we cannot continue the supplication, we have been so unfaithful and so basely ungrateful. Yet whilst we are in the very process of condemnation the Lord says, "There are two or three berries in the uppermost boughs." You would not feel your sin if you did not feel your shame. To know yourselves ashamed is to know that you are not left amongst the reprobate. If you feel any dread of having committed the unpardonable sin, you have not committed it; the very dread you feel is an argument against your fear. So we can pray, Lord, show us the four or five berries in the outmost fruitful branches. The religious societies of the country are bringing us in reports of murders, martyrs, all manner of evil doing. Our mission premises have been burned, our libraries have been reduced to cinders, what are we to do? It is then in that extremity that God says, "There are two or three berries on the uppermost bough." One berry is a proof that death has not finally set in; so is one prayer, one idea, one holy, noble impulse. Oh, poor self-accusing heart, if thou didst wish, this hard, icy morning, to come to this temple, if haply some word might be spoken to touch the sore of thine heart, regard that desire as the beginning of salvation, make the most of it; God means to do well with thee to-day.

We must make a book of these Isaiah references. We begin now. All the greatest references have yet to come. This poet of the garden has a great song; he will not sing it for a few chapters, but when he does sing it, it will feel as if heaven had opened, the wilderness and the solitary place shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. Isaiah cannot get away from his rose; he does not hide the rottenness, but he always comes back to bring that sweetest, fairest thing in all the garlands of the summer—a rich June rose.

What then are we to think of this when we generalise it for an immediate practical application? We are to think clearly four things. We are to feel that Isaiah connects the kingdom of God, the Church of the Well-beloved, with all things beautiful that grow. Isaiah does not refer us to images on the stony rock, he

does not refer to that which is statuesque and very imposing; he says, Come with me and look at these roses; that picture of colour represents the Church of the Wellbeloved; did you ever see anything so soft, so rich, so expressive in colour, so possibly symbolic in suggestion? They are all growing; not one of them is a creation of wax by some skilled or deft fingers; all these roses are growing. Then, secondly, the great prophet says, I identify all things with the kingdom of God, however various they may be in their beauty and in their mode of growing. The Church is not a great monotony; the Church is a band of music, the Church is a great picture full of all grades and values of colour, and every one of us may find a place in that parable of imagination. Provide for variety in the pulpit, out of the pulpit, in commerce, in statesmanship, in all the ways and ramifications of life. And then, thirdly, the great prophet says, Do not be content with duty, but have also utility. All these growing things mean fruit; the Husbandman will come to look after the vineyard: woe unto us if we have nothing to show but leaves! And then he tells us that when he wants a subject, nature is the first bible, and experience is the second. Why, all that is beautiful in nature is a bible; these are the parables of the first men. Flowers do not terminate in themselves. Sh! they are talking, they are singing, they are breathing, they are not perishable in their significance. They themselves grow, only they grow to some larger, fairer flowers that shall typify the Flower of Jesse and the Plant of Renown. There be good times in store!

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the Triune God, abide with us, and turn our desolations into gardens of beauty. Amen.

[*Sunday Morning, February 17th*, 1901.]

LET us see whether we can get on under very unusual and distressing circumstances. You will help me; you have been with me in my strength, you will not begrudge me the encouragement of your sympathy in my weakness. I have applied to two ministers this morning to take this place, but I have come without the slightest expectation of being able to carry out the programme; when I fail one of the deacons will take up the programme and handle it as may be required. I have done what I have never done in my life before, I have lost my voice—but only for the moment.

Prayer.

IN Thee, O Lord, is our strength, and Thou in Christ art the hope of our salvation. Other gods we have tried, and we have renounced; yea, we have beaten them and scorned them, and called them by their proper names. We have had our days of wickedness, and we redden with shame as we think of them. Other gods have had dominion over us; we have forsaken Thee, the fountain of living water, and we have hewed out unto ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that could hold no water. We have come to Thee by Thy grace as shown in the Cross, and now we are at rest, and now we begin our heaven. Thou hast placed us in a world lighted up by illustrations of Thy presence, Thy goodness, and Thy nearness to us. All things tell us how near Thou art; the distant stars send us messages of light, and the flowers beneath our feet send us gospels of fragrance. Thou art the God of the fields, the grassy plains, the fruitful meadows, and every tree of the forest is Thine; Lebanon and Bashan and Carmel are the object-lessons which Thou dost force with gentle suasion on our eyesight. Oh that we could consider the lilies! oh that we could read aright one blade of grass! we should then soon be wise in soul, full of considerateness and gratitude and appreciation of God's greatness and God's love. But we can read nothing aright, we are poor blunderers when we come to any part of Thy Word, be it a prophet's vision or the grass that grows in our own meadow. We do not read well, we have lost the music of appreciation; we spell badly, we cannot spell even Thine own name, shortest of all the names we know in all our language. Still Thou dost grow the green fields for us as if we were wise

husbandmen; Thou dost bring the seasons back again always in the same order, and still we regard them all as strangers whose names we can but hesitantly pronounce. We love to think of Thee as the God of the woods and the gardens and the cornfields. May we remember that all these things do not read in one way only; there is withering grass, there are fading flowers, there are trees in which the sap shall rise no more. May we keep our eyes open that we may behold things rightly, and see God in all the process, and be calm amid tumult, and hopeful even in the shortest, darkest winter day. We bless Thee for all the good men that have read the fields to us; we would keep company with these fresh-air men; they lead us through the uplands, and they give us rest in the dales; they are sent of God, they are men of the mountain, they are prophets of the forest. The Lord help us to keep steadily in their company; may we have ears opened to hear their softest tones. They will lead us to Jesus. His Cross was cut out of the woods; He who spake of the lilies died on a tree. It is most wonderful and most tender. Be with us now, we humbly pray Thee, in our meditation, that we may all become great seers, many-sighted prophets, Isaiahs that turn the solitary place into a garden of flowers. Amen.

Voluntary ... ... "Andante" ... ... *Guilmant*

Anthem 71 ... ... "We bow in prayer" ... ... *Bradbury*

The Lord's Prayer.—*Hawkins.*

Hymn 519 ... "The festal morn, O God, is come."

1st Lesson. Prov. x. 6-12.

Chant 26 ... ... Psalm viii. ... ... *Battishill*

2nd Lesson. 1 Cor. xiii. 8-13.

Anthem ... ..."The Lord hath chosen Zion" ... ... *J. F. Bridge*

Solo: Miss STANLEY LUCAS.

Prayer.

Hymn 236 ... ... "Art thou weary?"

Sermon.

Offertory and Quartette: "Lead, kindly light" ... ... *Sullivan*

Hymn 410 ... ... "Jesus, still lead on."

Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod.*

Voluntary ... ... "Postlude" ... ... *Swift*

CXXVIII.

THE POET OF HORTICULTURE.

II.

"*Thy dew is as the dew of herbs.*"—ISAIAH xxvi. 19.

AST Thursday we called Isaiah the Poet of Horticulture, the seer of the garden, the prophet that had eyes to read the grass. We gave proofs that these assertions were not rhetorical, but literal. If you take the grass and the flowers, the forests, the roses, the roots out of Isaiah, you sadly impoverish his immortal work. If we only read him now and then we do not catch all this parable of the fields. If we read Isaiah from the first chapter to the last we cannot but say, This was an out-of-doors man: this was a gardener; this man held large estates either in imagination or in reality, or in both; his garments smell of myrrh; he cannot talk long without bringing in the fields; his library was in the open air; he had no books at home in the sense in which we use the word books, but he had a boundless library at his own front door; he had only to put out his face, and he beheld literature in its virginal and most vernal sense. If he wanted a parable, which he often did, he found one in the garden. We could have more parables if we had keener eyes. Will you, as a spiritual exercise, write down on white paper all the passages in the prophecy of Isaiah which refer to the open air, to flowers, herbs, dew, trees, Lebanon, Bashan, Sharon, all the chief places of horticulture and floriculture? Will you gather these poems into a little book and bind it in white vellum and carry it with you when you go abroad in the fields? It is the sweetest of all companions. But who cares for it? All the botanical reading was, in a spiritual sense, done by the prophet Isaiah. He no sooner thinks of men rising again than he thinks of them as roots coming up out of the dust, and expressing themselves in broadening leaves, and on the tips of those green leaves he finds the silver of the morning, the dew of the early sky. It takes a great vision to see dew. Of course we lift up our walking staff and smite the dew from the overhanging

branches, and continue our vulgar conversation about beeves and calves. That is not seeing the dew, that is not drinking the crystal wine, the Chablis of the skies. But Isaiah saw the leaves, and he saw the dew, and he wrote about them; and we never read what he wrote. We say the age of poetry is dead. The age of poetic readers was never quite alive. Only a poet can read a poet; only he who has inner eyes, and not the painted blue of the painted mask, can read the inner writing of the invisible hand. What should we do without parables, without figures and metaphors? It would be like living upon an earth that had no sky, and if there is a ghastlier, deadlier life than that, I never heard of it.

It will be a long time before Isaiah reverts to the figure of herb and dew? No, it will be in the very next chapter. We saw that he began with his first chapter, and now we have him beginning as it were again in the twenty-seventh chapter. This is his beautiful parable: can we be still enough to hear it? "In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. . . . He shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit." He cannot get away from his destiny; he was made to explain gardens and roses and all fair flowers, and also to accompany us through the wasting places and point out the meaning of the roots and blossoms that never came to fruition. This is a parable with two sides. And the Lord planted the vineyard. The Lord said He would not leave it for a single day. He gave the thief no chance. He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

Then Isaiah reverts to those who would fight fire with wooden swords; he is terrible in mockery: "Who would set the briers and thorns against me in battle?" What poor soldiers they would make! "I would go through them, I would burn them together." Still Isaiah plays the same tune on the same harp. Now he will take a long time before he reverts to his garden or vineyard or forest? No, he will do it again in the very next chapter. "Give ye ear, and

hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech." Will it be upon a new subject? Not at all; Isaiah has only one subject; that subject is the plough or the field, or subjects related thereto, and taking their very life from agriculture. Let us hear this man, this Burns of the olden day. "Doth the plowman plow all day to sow? doth he open and break the clods of his ground? When he hath made plain the face thereof, doth he not cast abroad the fitches, and scatter the cummin, and cast in the principal wheat and the appointed barley and the rie in their place?" How does the ploughman know how to plough and how to harrow, and how to work out all the parable of the field? The answer is given in Isaiah xxviii. 26: "For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him." The ploughman is a theologian. We should only despise theology when it is falsely defined; rightly defined, all life is theological, that is to say, all life is rooted in God, springs out of God, returns to God, and is renewed by God day by day.

Does Isaiah say anything more about this ploughing and sowing? He does. "For the fitches are not threshed with a threshing instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned about upon the cummin; but the fitches are beaten out with a staff, and the cummin with a rod." There had been fools in those days who were using the wrong instruments and making no progress; for God was against them. They were going to thresh the fitches with a threshing instrument; it looked so big and so grand to do it, but nature rebuked the foolish ones, and said, It is quite right to thresh cummin, but not with that great ugly iron thing you have got hold of; fitches are beaten out with a staff; take the right instrument for the right work. So many people, called by poetic license well-meaning, are always trying to do the right work with the wrong instruments. And we smile when that work is not ours; we say, Poor things! they mean so well, it is really almost amusing to see how they use the cart-wheel where they ought to have used a staff. When you hear persons making such large, charitable allowances for work ill done, be perfectly sure it is not their own work they are talking about, but that somebody else claims it and has to pay for it.

When will people learn this simple lesson, that you must do the right thing in the right way, and by the right instrument, and at the right time? When will people come to know that you cannot quarry a rock with a pair of scissors? But they who have the scissors are well-meaning, rather interesting, pale-faced persons. They should not work long in my quarry at my cost.

Will the prophet say more? He will. "Bread corn is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen." Then who is to teach all these ploughmen and corndealers, and who has undertaken the great art of bread-growing and bread-baking? The Lord. We thought the Lord was associated with mighty miracles, amazing and bewildering wonders. So He is, but He is also associated with your oven and the baking of your bread. He is a domestic God; He is the God of the house. How does this knowledge get into the cranium of the ploughman? The answer is: "This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts, which is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working." We should be better ploughmen if we could pray better. Why will we cut ourselves off from the great current of vitality? Why will we issue little patents and notions and inventions of our own? Oh that I could rest my weary head upon the very breast of God! Out of the throb of that pulse I should get a life that would overcome all difficulties and make me master of the situation. There are those acute people who separate the action of life into secular and spiritual. The devil scored a great triumph when he got that distinction established in the Church. Is ploughing a spiritual action? The atheistic answer would be, Certainly not; if there is anything secular, why, of course it is ploughing. What does our poet of the garden say? Speaking of ploughing, he says, "This also cometh forth from the Lord of hosts." Then where are the temporalities? Nowhere! Is it not true that a man who attends the doors of the sanctuaries is attending to temporalities, and the man who is officiating in the pulpit is attending to spiritualities? Nothing of the kind—a dog's definition, a poodle's

grammar! All things are of God. Go forth, then, O ploughman, to the sanctuary of the field; read God's revelation there. God made the field and God made the plough and God made the ploughman. All things are of sweet heaven; not a green meadow but dropped out of the skies. Why not read the theology, the poetry, and the dream of things, and be wiser than the beasts?

Now Isaiah can say nothing more about the fields? I beg to remind you that Isaiah has hardly begun yet upon his favourite subject. In chapter xxxii. 15 he calls our attention to a fine glorious morning:—"Until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest." How this poetic interpretation of nature follows the man, how it makes his heart joy, how it makes his head as a lighthouse seen afar amid all the prophets of Israel! The prophet was all this and something more. Something higher! was his cry—not on this little flat, but on that rock—but on that rock—but upon the other rock above it five thousand feet; and not there, but upon the further rock away where measuring is idleness.

I have already hinted that there are two sides to this parable; it is not all greenness, beauty, fruitfulness. In chapter xxxiii. 9, "Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits." A great terror has seized them all; some shame has arisen in Israel. Judah has been treacherous, the hearts of the people have been turned into flint before the loving God; and Lebanon will not have it, and Sharon shrinks out of sight back into the sand, burning and waterless, and Bashan and Carmel shake off what few fruits there were upon their branches, and they say in effect, We cannot flourish when God is dishonoured. It is just the same to-day. All things go crookedly when prayer is paralysed. We will stop at the markets, we will not go through the market into the sanctuary to know what all this tumult in the market is about; we stop at the wrong places, and therefore get insufficient explanation. "Let the earth praise Thee, O God, yea, let all the earth praise Thee;

then shall the earth yield her increase." We deal with our famine funds and irrigation plans and deep schemes of doing something underground. It would be the true wisdom—nobody would believe it—if we could say, The root of all this mischief is moral, spiritual; the heart has gone astray from God, and the only way that God can get hold of some callous or seared consciences is by taking the corn away, by stopping the olive supply, by sending a murrain upon the cattle. The Jonah who would preach this in the English Nineveh would be called a fanatic, an enthusiast, a person, no doubt good-meaning, but not political. God is therefore driven, so to say, to resources of which He has no desire to avail Himself. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked"—in any death. But men will have it so.

Why do not men build out all these ravages of nature? Because they cannot. In Isaiah xxxiv. 13, "thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof." God grows nettles in strange places. "Nettles" is a word that wants minute and critical definition. What are these irritations? Nettles. What are all these vexations and disappointments? Thorns. Why do not things go smoothly? Because the palace is given over to nettles, and the fortress is surrendered to brambles. The growing thing overthrows the thing that is not growing. Why is this wall shaking? You see that little green plant just where my finger points? Yes. That is the reason. But you do not mean to tell me that a little green plant like that can throw down a brick wall? Yes, it could throw down a palace. That little green thing means so much more than it seems to be; it is part of a going concern, it is part of a universe that must grow by life and live by growth. Who would have thought that quite a little growing thing could have thrown down a garden wall? It is the garden wall that must get out of the road. Things living conquer things that have no life, and for life the universe must give way. Then cometh the end, when death shall be swallowed up of victory.

He is done now? He will be approaching the end

when he has written the thirty-fifth chapter, part of which we have often sung with right royal strength and ennobling music: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God." Hope is the gift of prophecy, hope is the seal of prophecy. The Gospel is a gospel of hope. It says, There shall be a better manhood, there shall be a fairer earth, there shall be a bluer sky: Prepare ye the way of the Lord. For we have seen nothing yet of greenness or the beauty of the blue sky, nothing of the gorgeousness of the possible summer. Why, can we see better than we have seen? Read Isaiah lv. 13: "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree." "The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Said we not of a truth that this man is the poet of the garden, the seer of horticulture, the interpreter of growing things? He will say more yet. The true poet is never exhausted.

[Sunday Morning, February 24th, 1901.]

On coming to the church this morning I heard that a very venerable and very dear friend had been removed from this sphere and transferred to the inner and invisible temple of God. Mr. Ebenezer Harrison, our senior deacon, died but a few hours ago. He was one of the deacons who came to Manchester thirty-four years ago, and asked me to come to London to be a minister in the very centre of the City. I have known Mr. Harrison all that time. He was an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile. He was wealthy in cheerfulness. Whilst I was hurrying along in the shadows of the hedges, he was flying in the open blue air and singing songs of praise to God. I have often told him that his cheerfulness should be set down as at least a thousand a year income. Then he would laugh again that rich, significant—may I say religious?—laugh, in which he blessed God for a spirit of content. Mr. Harrison always spread a very happy influence amongst us. As teacher in the Sunday school, as superintendent of the school, as deacon, in every relation which he sustained to this church, he was the very spirit of geniality and friendliness and sympathy. He was, I think, about eighty years of age. If there was any fault to find with him it was that nobody ever said anything against him—at least, to my knowledge. If there is a woe coming upon those of whom all men speak well, I am afraid that Ebenezer Harrison will yet have a hard time of it. We will think of him always gratefully, lovingly, and will thank God for his good cheer, for his power of inspiring and stimulating other people. All the little children loved him, as flowers love the sun.

Prayer.

WE bless Thee, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for all things great and small, for the green grass, and for the blue heaven, for the little flowers and the unmeasured stars. We love to think that all things are in the hollow of God's hand; we are at rest when we believe this with our whole heart. Make us true men, through and through, absolutely true according to Thine own truthfulness. This can be done by the blood of Jesus Christ Thy Son, which cleanseth from all sin—the last faint stain. We would be perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect; we would be holy, as God is holy—such a great holiness that it can love, such a complete holiness that it can forbear to strike. Oh that we might enter into these unspeakable mysteries and rejoice in their gracious influence over the soul! We have been so little Thine; we have been Thine in parts, and on occasions, and in foolish prejudices, but we have not been Thine in and out, through and through, all in all, and all for all, having no self. Yet this is what the Cross was set up to teach us. Have pity upon our folly, and make us through the Cross wholly Thine. Amen.

CXXIX.

CHRIST AND NATURE.

"Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"—MATT. vi. 30.

INDLY allow me to go at my own pace, and we shall, God strengthening us, get through the whole service. I have come out of the bed of affliction for your sakes, and you will help me by your sympathy and prayer.

We have been studying the prophet Isaiah in his relation to green things, growing things, beautiful agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, and as I concluded this study on Sunday morning I wondered whether there was any counterpart to it all in our Lord's teaching, who Himself was typified as a Root out of a dry ground—quite a wayside thing, not worth gathering, if appearances were to guide the gathering. That is the subject this morning: Christ in His relation to growing things, to nature in her growing aspects, her summers and her flowers, her whole basket of poetry, and her sweet song of prosperity and content.

We may begin anywhere; let us begin at Matthew vi. 30: "If God so clothe the grass." There is a little faint tone of depreciation in that remark. Perhaps we have not detected it before, but the depreciation is contrastive. We must place the emphasis not on "the grass," but on the contrast which the grass is cited to vivify and exemplify. "If God so clothe the grass of the field"—so small and insignificant a thing as the grass that grows under your feet—what will He do for you, His sons, His daughters, His

children redeemed and in process of final anointment and sanctification? The argument is progressive, and is an instance of *a fortiori* reasoning. If in the little, how much in the great: a favourite teacher in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He knew we were poor scholars, so He sat down with us when we could only write on a sandy board and with a borrowed skewer, and He had patience with us in that candle-lighted night-school. If ye being evil know how to give bread and comfort to your children, how much more—— That is the ascending argument. It outlines itself like a temple dome.

I wish we could believe this argument drawn from the grass. There is no want of beauty in the grass meadows. The landscape would be poor without the homely field where the cattle are, the cows and the sheep and other living things connected with home and farm life. Jesus did not despise the grass; He was only contrasting it with something other. There is a whole population on a grass-blade; I do not know what economies are set up there. The more I study nature—which is my second favourite study—the more I am astounded at the life that is in everything. Who can say what is done within the compass of a grass-blade?—what kings and queens are there, or what municipalities and mayoralties and wondrous arrangements? who can measure the microcosm of a grass-blade? Wherefore, if there is so much God in one grass-blade, what must there be in a system of planets and in the ever-accumulating galleries of stars that fill the spaces of the sky? I do not wonder that people invented polytheism; I do not see so much wrong in polytheism as I see in non-theism. It does look as if it would require many Deities to support a frame so vast, so inter-related, so wondrous in music and in poetry. The wonder is that anyone can look upon this frame and outline of things and feel that it is self-made or self-sustained.

Then said Christ in this immediate connection, You cannot understand My doctrine, yet My doctrine goes further back than the dew, is older than the fountains plashing their water upon the rock. You cannot

accompany Me so far, let us sit down here at this very point and "consider the lilies,"—let us all be children for a moment. We need not pluck the lilies; to pluck a lily is to kill it: never pluck a flower if you can help it. But consider how they grow; no man knows, no man can explain to you how the lilies get on. No man ever saw a lily grow; he has seen the lily after it has grown, and he has even gone so far as to explain how wonderfully these lilies have grown since I was here last. Yet though you had feed the constabulary of London to watch these little things add to themselves, the whole detective force of the greatest metropolis in the world never could have seen just how and from the very first, *ab initio*, these little things grew in stature. Why, you have never seen how your own child grows. You have remarked now and then that the boy seems to have grown in the night-time. So he has; there is no night with God. Jesus Christ was always anxious that we should be considering something. Always have a great question before the mind. We are killed by frivolity. What the Church needs do-day is not some little niggling question, but some grand problem going back into eternity, and forward into the everlasting, and between points operating beneficently and luminously upon the life of man. The Church that is filled with a great question is a Church that has no little debates in it; no one can be insolent enough to raise a little frivolous question when a grand problem is awaiting the solution of the intelligence and the affections of the Church. It is the same in your life; the only reason you have little difficulties and peevish hours, and that you are really fretful and foolish, is that you have no great question at home; you read nothing, you have no grand book clamouring to be taken down from the shelf again and to be studied. Nothing like a great problem, intellectual or moral, for steadying the mind and giving rest to the heart. Saith Christ, therefore, "Consider the lilies." That is about the biggest question you can entertain at present; entertain it, and you will find that you have entertained the summer, and the summer is the season of revelation and music.

There is a religious mystery in all growing things. I do not know that there is much mystery, though

there is a little, in a stone wall. A stone wall is a kind of proposition in geometry, but there is no ghostly margin, none of the stones seem to quake under a weight greater than their own, all the stones seem to be fastened in their places by a pressure more than fifteen pounds to the square inch; there is no religious mystery of a very perplexing or elevating kind about a stone wall, but there is about a nettle, that wasp of the vegetable world. A nettle has a mystery. It is loved very little; I do not know that anybody really loves the nettle. There are a great many persons who avoid it, but the mystery of growth is there, and it is the mystery of growth to which the great Teacher draws our attention. How is it done? What wonderful work is done in this silent factory? All Jesus Christ wants us to do is to think; He says in effect, Do rest a moment and think about something; I will pluck you a grass-blade, and see you again in twenty-four hours to ascertain what you have made of it; have a subject to interest your mind and heart, and let it have a religious significance. Every growing thing is a religious mystery. Growth is religious, philosophical, inexplicable. I think it would be convenient sometimes to be an agnostic regarding growth. Thou knowest not how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; thou knowest not how the lilies grow. We are shut out from the wombs of things, from the great mysteries, from the true origins, and at best it would appear sometimes as if we were but Gentiles of the outer court, waiting till the golden portals of the temple be opened, and some kindlier than priestly voice bids us enter and read the inner writing. "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven——" Here is something, you see, perishable, yet typical. The grass is always on the way to something else; not to nothingness. The grass may be on the way to the sustentation of life. All these grass-blades may go to feed the lamb, and the lamb goes to feed the man, and the man goes to feed the other Man, the ever-coming Man, the Adam of the eternal purpose.

Once, looking upon the fields, He said, "The harvest truly is plenteous" (Matt. ix. 37). There He takes

another step on the line of growing things. "The harvest truly is plenteous." There is no failure on the part of God. He gives you souls enough to save, and you are staying at home and not attempting to save them. God always finds work enough for the Church, if the Church had but eyes to see it. Jesus Christ does not say, This is a poor pinched world, a mere starveling of a planet; it is not worth while living in it, certainly not worth while to redeem it; it is a plain nothing. He always took the large view of the world, the large view of man, the large view of God. Truly He found the ladder as to its foot upon the earth, but a ladder is not all foot; the ladder has length, the ladder has a head, and no man has seen the head of God's ladder; it is away yonder up among the opals of the morning, away lost in the unmeasured immensities. If we are only at the foot of the ladder, God be thanked, that is a beginning; he who has seen the dawn may see the noonday. "The harvest truly is plenteous." There are souls by the million to be saved. If there are fifteen hundred millions of people on the planet to-day, there are twelve hundred millions of these and more who perhaps have never heard the name of Christ Jesus, Saviour of the world. There are men and women and children in London to-day who have never heard that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Perhaps you may quote me some instances in which the mere words have been heard, but they have left no impression upon the mind, and therefore they have not been heard in any real sense. To hear is to be saved. We have been unjust to the word hear or heard. We think any man can hear; that is a fatal mistake. Few men can see or hear; sight is genius, hearing is the gift of God. "He that hath ears to hear——" What a mysterious expression, what an absurd expression from a merely literal point of view! As if any man could not be heard; as if to have ears was not the same thing as to hear. It is not. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Only he can hear. Many a time have I taken occasion to say that perhaps not a dozen men in any congregation are listening to the discourse; they are listening to a voice heard through other voices, or heard through the imagination or the critical faculty; they are not steeped in hearing,

drenched with attention, saturated with the desire that not a word should escape, not a tone should elude. If we could have such hearing we should have salvation on a large scale. We do not hear, and we do not regard.

The Saviour on another occasion, in the gospel according to John, makes use of the same figure; He says, "The fields are white unto the harvest." Jesus Christ could never get rid of the harvest idea; you will be surprised if you gather together the passages in which the word harvest occurs in the utterances of Christ. "The harvest truly is plenteous;" "the fields are already white unto the harvest." You say there are but three months to harvest; why, the harvest is ripe now,—out with the sickle, forward to the field, reap sheaves for God.

The blessed Saviour could not have lived if He could not have seen the harvest. It is because He is the End that He can bear to be the Beginning. "I am Alpha because I am Omega." To be Alpha is to be in agony, to be both Alpha and Omega is to be at rest, is to exemplify and to realise the peace of God. The fields are white unto the harvest; that is to say, all things are waiting. The fields are growing whilst we are sleeping. All things are to be spiritually interpreted. We have had the literalist long enough; I think we might now with the utmost civility and thankfulness give him notice to quit. But the fields will always be ready for the poet; his function never ceases. The Bible as a letter has been well handled; the Bible as a poem we have not begun. There is a botanist's flower, and there is a poet's flower, and in each case the flower is the same. Here is a man, with his microscope and his gum-pot and his costly album, who takes the flower to pieces and calls each piece by a name unknown to his mother tongue; it would never do for science to talk in language that the man on the street could understand; that would be to do away with science very largely; the great thing is to keep the man on the street just where he is; there is no room up there for him, and for pity's sake do not call him inside. But the poet comes and says, "I do

not want to cut this flower to pieces, I have no steel instrument for the ripping up of these beautiful things; I will set them in liquid soil, that is to say, in water, and in that water they shall find meat and drink; and I will tell you what they say to me all day long." Then he begins to interpret the parable of the flower. The flower tells him where it was found, where it grew, how long it grew there, what winds have blown through it, what little birds have hovered near it, and what wondrous things it has heard in the sanctuary of solitude. That is the man we want in relation to the Bible. We can do with both the men, but the one man may take an eight-hours' day, and welcome; the other man will want an eternal day, and more welcome still. The Bible has been sufficiently translated, it now needs to be transubstantiated.

Will the Saviour ever mention anything about fields and growing things again? Why, the Saviour was the author of a sweet little book; I wish it could be printed alone, and be profusely and exquisitely illustrated by the very finest artist that ever lived. Many parts of the New Testament have been treated so; the most of us have little pictures with exquisite designs and portraitures. The little book I want to see printed on paper of gold, with letters of diamonds, with illustrations of summer, is the parable of the sower. That is so true from end to end; it is the parable of to-day, it is the parable of every ministry, it is the parable of every congregation; the sower is still going forth to sow. That was the subject of the first window I had put in this church, and I go to look at it before almost every morning service; it means so much to me, and yet some people who sit near it have never seen it. "The sower went forth to sow." He had business on hand; it was a growing business, it was a most fruitful purpose that filled his mind; he was going in the providence of God to turn the wilderness into a garden, the fair fields into fruitful and prosperous and plenteous valleys. You think everybody understands the parable of the sower? But Jesus Christ was asked when He was done what it was all about. That is always trying to a poor preacher,

and if Christ had been less than Christ He would have been grieved in His heart; but He said He would tell them what it was all about if they would come into the house. Some things can only be announced in thunder, and other things are best expounded in whispers. So He said, What I have been telling you about the sower amounts to this, they that received on good ground, they that received in stony places, they that received by the wayside, and so forth. Then He translated the whole thing into common daily talk.

Is that all He had to say about growing things? No, He had a far greater one, exceedingly graphic, and exceedingly modern, as well as immeasurably ancient. There was a man, He said, who spent all his time in sowing good seed in his field. He was proud of that field, he set it apart and made a kind of pet field of it; and when he slept a man came and sowed tares. A good deal of mischief can be done without the daylight; the night is the sanctuary which the devil avails himself of very much. In due time the seed and the tares both came up, and the man said, "An enemy hath done this! What shall be done? Shall we pluck up the tares?" No, let both grow until—then comes in the Saviour's favourite word—"the harvest." The harvest will settle everything; we shall know what things are when we get to the end of them. So we are prepared to wait for the present; we cannot explain it, it is hard to bear, and we say, "Pluck it up," and the Lord saith, No, not yet, but by and by there shall be plucking, no doubt about that, the destruction is certain; but wait. To wait is to be educated.

Now surely even so fertile a teacher as Jesus Christ must be done with His references to nature? Not yet; He says, "This kingdom that I have come to reveal is like unto a grain of mustard seed." There He is, you see, once more in the field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown, how ample its branches, how ungrudging its hospitality! The kingdom of God is like unto a grain of mustard seed, in that it is vital, in that it is expansive, in that it is hospitable, and in that it gathers unto its warm

bosom every bird that needs a night's lodging. Jesus Christ had no patience with things that were not growing, and that yet pretended to grow. He never rebuked a stone wall for not growing. Like His own Nature, He is determined to throw down all stone walls, He cannot bear the sight of them. Nature is no friend of masonry; architecture has no such deadly opponent as Nature. Before you say the consecration prayer in the cathedral, Nature has begun to take the roof off. That is always the way; it is Nature's way; she says, As many trees as you like, but no buildings; as many flowers as there are, but no bricks. One day walking along the roadside—I think I see Him now; it is my delight to figure my Lord in many an aspect—He went up to a fig-tree hoping to find figs thereon, and when He found none He said, "Henceforth let no fruit grow on thee for ever!" and the thing withered away. All things wither that are not warm with the smile of God. On another occasion, looking over His vineyard or His orchard, He said, "What is this tree doing here? This is the third year I have come to see it, and it bears no fruit; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

And then I think—for this I have reserved for my last point—it was, if I may so say, at the high point of summer one day when He said to us, "I am the Vine." Still in nature, still among plants, flowers, and growing things; still a vineyard. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches; herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Fruit is the purpose of God. If you are being cut by some sharp instrument it is that you, being pruned, may bring forth more fruit. If the branch is taken out of the vine it cannot grow, it cannot bring forth fruit; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. Abide in Me, and I in you, and both of us in God. Then Christianity is a religion of growth? Is that enough? No. What is enough? Fruit.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, fruits of the tree of life, be the nourishment of our souls for ever! Amen.

[*Sunday Morning, March 10th*, 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, our Father, we come to Thee in the name of Jesus Christ Thy Son. We ask, What have we left but the living God? for the forests are withered, and the rocks are melted, and the sea has evaporated; what is there left but the Eternal All? If things have faded away from our sight, it is that we might see Thee more clearly and feel more tenderly how near Thou art. We have been deceived by these base things that are round about us; we have mistaken their meaning, we have been crushed by their weight, we have been overborne by their cold shadow; but now and again we have seen the Lord as it were face to face, and our hearts have known the power of a gracious gladness. We thank Thee for all this revelation of life; it is mystery upon mystery, but it is also light upon light. We have now learned in the oldness of our age and the far-down-deepness of the valley to say, But He giveth more grace; He giveth grace upon grace, blossom upon blossom, sunshine upon sunshine, until, behold, we are struck with the fulness of His love and the plentifulness of His enduring mercy. We bless Thee for occasional lightness of heart, we thank Thee for the intervals of blessings that come between the series of pains and distresses. All these things are tokens of Thy nearness. We felt a great weight, but we remembered how suddenly it was taken from us; we were lost in sevenfold shadow, but we recollected how the shafts of light flew away about us and broke up the gloom. We will not forget the Lord, we will sing loudly of His mercy, and we will praise the Hand that has defended us from the first. We are here to bless Thee; it is good to be in Thy house; the walls thereof are transparent, we see through them towards a better building, a loftier and an enduring sanctuary. Oh that here we might have through Christ and His Cross a sense of sin forgiven, sorrow sanctified, perplexity relieved, and all the rest of the way lighted as by a lamp let down from heaven. The Lord hear us; the Lord dry our tears; the Lord lift us up awhile that we may stand before Him as monuments of His grace. We come in the name that is above every name; that name is our plea, that name is our answer—the name of Jesus—disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious. Amen.

CXXX.

ALGEBRAIC RELIGION.

"*As though.*"—1 Cor. vii. 30.

"AS though they had none" (verse 29); "As though they wept not" (verse 30); "As though they rejoiced not" (verse 30); "As though they possessed not" (verse 30). The text is "As though," "As if." Let us assume something; let us get away from the merely literal fact, and turn the whole idea into an assumption. Let it be as if it were; as a matter of fact, it is not so, but let us for the moment assume as if it were so; let us take it for granted. It is not so, but let us take it for granted that for the nonce it is so. This is a new mode of reasoning; it admits of varied and happy application. The question is not, Is this or that so? the proposition is, Let it be granted for the moment that it is so. A man is weeping, but let us assume that he is not weeping, or that there is, deeper than all the tears, a most subtle and gracious joy which will finally assert itself and govern the man's life. If we can get certain minds beyond the mere gate-post; if we can get certain minds to believe for the moment that the stone wall is a wall of gold and jasper—not that it is so, but for certain reasons we assume that it is so—we shall have a converted world, an illuminated intellect, a new kind and quality of soul. It is the stupid ones that keep us back; it is the people who have never got out of arithmetic into algebra that stop the progress of the kingdom. Arithmetic is ennobled and idealised, made into types and symbols, and called up into a new function and expression. But we cannot get people to go into algebra; it is enough for them to know the first four rules of arithmetic, and to forget the multiplication table; that is their idea of scholarship, and we cannot dislodge it.

Now we are often challenged in Holy Writ to do a little spiritual algebra. The great teachers have called in an x. We voted against it, we opposed it, we were

bitterly resentful and hostile in relation to the man who wanted to make some kind of use of the letter x. We had a grudge against him; he wanted to be wise above the multiplication table, we said: not knowing that the multiplication table would follow that x all the way through all its windings and doublings and complications and bring it out at the last a plain concrete figure. But we cannot get men to believe this, and they plead the right of private judgment,—as if there could be any such thing! except in words, beggarly, all but useless, and often misleading words. There is nothing private; we should know that if we got higher up into the whispering gallery. We think we are alone when we are not alone, when we are in the midst of a great company and crowd, but it pleases us to think we have the right of private judgment, and anything that relieves a man's feelings, even though only sold by a chemist, is not to be so severely objected to. Meanwhile, those who have ideality and imagination and that wonderful intellectual power of grasping the upper, must be encouraged to pursue their way, to continue their studies, to complete their education.

Let us see how this works out in various ways. The subject is Algebraic Religion. "As if," "As though"; it is not so, but take it as if it were so. Let the Lord Himself come down and open the gates that He may lead us into the richest of His pastures, and may He even at noonday send a plentiful rain upon His inheritance. Let us look at creation in the light of this suggestion; by creation I mean this great wondrous system of things, even so far as it reveals itself to the naked eye, and let us go through it, or such portion of it as is accessible, as if it had been divinely made, as if it throbbed with God. We do not say that it does so, but we ask ourselves to believe for the moment that it is so; and then we want to test the ideality by what we know of the fact. We are to assume that God made it all. We are not going to compel any man to say that there is a God, we only ask that man who has a difficulty about creation to accept this suggestion—he may accept a thousand others—that this whole framework is set up, governed, and ministered by a living, personal God.

What do you say to that? Well, judging by appearances and measurements, it does look as though this great scheme of things which we call nature might have been fashioned by some one; there is a shapeliness about it that suggests personality, high art, infinite power, marvellous adaptation. So far your x works well. You said, Let x be the unknown quantity, and that x you called God. I am bound as a candid inquirer to say, On my soul, it looks as if it were so; having studied this machinery for some fifty years, I have had more proofs that it may have been created and may be governed by a living God than I have had proofs to the contrary. Yes, I am bound to admit that; if it comes to a matter of proof, if it comes to the working out of a practical equation, I am bound to admit that the proofs seem to me to be innumerable and cogent on the side of a possible personal creator and sovereign. The whole thing is so vast that no man can have done it; the whole mechanism is so exquisite, so mutually adapted part to part, that I do not think it could have made itself. If it had been the size of anything that we could have carried in our hands, we might have imagined that some human giant long ago put the clay together into the shape that we now see it. But even then the question would have remained, Where did he get the clay? That is the awkward point. We can do many things if we get some sort of material to begin with; but to have had none to begin with, and somehow to have got it into existence, and got it into existence in what they now tell us was a very small initial kind of shape and degree, and to have worked upon that, and blown it out, and flashed it forth into suns and stars and temples of worlds,—I think your suggestion is reasonable. I understand you suggest that this whole mechanical economy which we call the universe may have been created and may now be personally administered. Well, on my soul, I think it may be so; almost thou persuadest me to be a believer.

What is the other idea? The other x is that all came to be nobody knows how. I could believe the first theory sooner. The other lame and blind x is that somehow things—atoms, molecules, whatever the

little things may be—got together, laid their heads together in counsel and finally came out in the shape of a universe. No, I am willing to oblige you, but I cannot; it would relieve me of some difficulty if I could oblige you, if I could say that the whole conception of things is confusion, a harum-scarum without policy, a great, marvellous display of nothingness. But the one man asks me to believe that the universe was made and is administered by a personal, living, loving God; and the other man asks me to believe that the whole thing called the universe is after all nothing at all but just a little film or species of expanded gas or magnified vapour that really means nothing and had no beginning, has no reality, and will have no ending. No! I think I will go to church. Now that you suggest the idea and ask me to look at the universe as if it were the expression of a great personality, I thank you for the idea; it does look as if it might be so; but to suggest that it is the expression of nothing leads me to say that credulity is even greater than faith.

Let us look at man as if—as though—he were obeying a divine impulse. We do not say that he is obeying such an impulse, we are simply saying, Let us look at man in the light of the suggestion that he may be obeying a divine impulse and working out a divine purpose. I must say here, as I said a moment ago, that when I take in great breadths of human history it seems as if man, total man, were being machined, administered, and educated, and set to a great purpose by some living, mysterious, inscrutable Personality. What is the other x? The other x is: Man is a mere anecdote, a sort of crude and incoherent fact, generally a nuisance, not knowing whether he came from the east or from the west; a drunken kind of intoxicated and muddled dream of a thing. No; I will not walk one moment in company with that assumption. But when you ask me to look at man in great breadths of development and education and progress, as if he were working out a divine purpose, you make a strong appeal to my reason. You do not wait for me to fall into a dream that you may show me a vision of colour; you meet me at high noon in the broad market-place of things and

you talk sense to me. You do not ask me to subscribe to any theological dogma about providence or sovereignty, I understand you to say, Read the history of man in centuries and generations as if—as though—the whole human drama were the conception of a divine, an infinite Mind. I like your notion, I will think it over carefully; it is so strong in reason. You do not invoke my belief in a superstition, but in a possibility; you do not ask me to confine myself to a small group of men, a mere class of specimen beings; I understand you to ask me to read human history in generations, in centuries, in cycles, in totalities, and I tell you that in so far as I am able to do this your suggestion does seem to me to be sane. As for the other man's suggestion, I will not further inquire into such moonshine. Let us look at man as if he were working out a divine purpose.

What a marvellous power there is in the human creation to stop congestion. We have congested districts, we appoint constabulary to see that the metropolitan streets are not congested with traffic. There is a wonderful arrangement somewhere by which congestion on a still larger and more significant scale is considered and prevented. If I study the history of all these trades now, how marvellously the trades are kept up. How is it that a boy takes to a certain course, and even his mother cannot prevent him? You tell me that there are boys on the face of the green earth who want to go down into the very bosom of the earth, a thousand feet or a thousand fathoms, and dig coal there all day? No! Yes, yes, yes! But would not the boys on being asked to go into mines, coal or tin or other mineral, say in a moment, Do you suppose we are mad that we should for one instant listen to an appeal to bury ourselves during all the hours of daylight? Yet they go, and they cannot go anywhere else; they want to go; they feel as if a spiritual voice were within them calling, The pit is ready! But would you not much rather be a gardener than a pitman? No. Why not? I do not know, but not for all the world would I be a gardener; I will go down this shaft and live there all the day and lie on my back and dig coals. However did you come by such an eccentric and outrageous idea? I do not know,

but I have it, and I must work it out. Then, looking at all this wonderful succession of artists—artists in colour, artists in tune, artists in literary execution—being but newly come from the pit boy, I say, Would you like to go down into the bowels of the earth and dig coals all day? I frighten the artist, I paralyse the whole brood. Go down into the earth and hew coals all day? The man is mad! It is so strange that the boy should some day say to his father that he wants to leave his father and go to sea. The suggestion is absurd; here you have a spacious and comfortable home, a great welcome written in sunshine on your table and on your bed; what do you mean by wishing to go to sea? That is God's way of keeping up the mariners of the world and the pitmen and the artists, and preventing congestion. For what would happen if they all settled upon one policy and upon one course of living and action?

Why do you not marry this man or that woman? why choose the kind of thing—excuse apparent impoliteness—that you seem to have set your mind upon? Verily, the answer is, I do not know, I cannot tell, but this is the woman, this is the man, this is destiny. But, see here, let us talk the thing over quietly: you never saw this man until about six or twelve months ago, and you actually propose now to leave your father and your mother and to go with him to the ends of the earth, if he wants to go to that vague address. You cannot help it. There must be One above who is managing things. We can say No to Him, we can take the wrong course; it has always lain within the functions of humanity to be able to disobey the Lord. But if you would rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, then He would send you to the east or to the west, the north or the south, and, obeying that holy impulse, you would find a preliminary heaven, you would be able to antedate the eternal rest. And when I look at the boys and the girls I wonder how it is that they are so well proportioned in numbers. That is very curious. The man who has the bad x says that they might all have been boys or they might all have been girls. I would not believe in that man for one moment; let him and his x go away from me and take a long walk.

But when I see proportions, relations, distributions, qualifications, and have access to a kind of invisible catalogue and diary of things, and you whisper to me, "Now, without saying anything dogmatic, let us look at all this arrangement of the sexes and think of it as if, as though, it were settled in heaven," I tell you, sir, your appeal is strong in reason; you are no superstitious fool, you make a sane suggestion.

And how is it that these men that you see on your right hand or on your left are a sort of animated motor car and steam engine and locomotive? There are people who cannot sit down; there are persons who cannot for the very life of them sit still; they want to know what is round the corner, what is on the other side of the mountain, what they would find if they were to navigate the sea. Who wrought in them that spirit of restlessness? Look at that spirit in the light of the suggestion that they are working as if under a divine impulse. These are the discoverers, the explorers, the geographers, the conquerors of the world; without these men civilisation would stand still, progress would be impossible; they are always fitting out new ships for new shores. Take the suggestion that they are doing it as if they were the servants of the living God, and I claim for that suggestion sanity, high possibility, majesty of reason. Things do not happen so much as some people would have us believe; life is not a series of happenings, of hapchances. There is order in all the development of life; God is ruling, directing. I might not myself have conceived that notion, but now that you suggest it, it seems to me wonderful that I never thought of it before. That is the way with all great discoveries, with all illuminated sayings and poems. The man who has been most with God speaks sentences that we ourselves would have spoken if they had occurred to us; we know their origin when we hear their music.

I apply the same test to the Bible. I as an outsider for the moment do not know how it was written, who wrote it, where they live, and what was their habit of life. It is a curious book, most strange, most dreamy, most paralysing, most com-

forting ; I do not know what to make of this book. Whilst I am so musing a man comes to me and says, Now read that Book as if God had dictated or inspired it ; I do not ask you to aceept any theory of inspiration, but I offer you this suggestion—read the Book right through as if, as though, it were a divine revelation. Well, I will do that, I will begin at the beginning, and go steadily through the whole book in the light of the suggestion you have now made, which is that the book ought to be read as if God had written it. After a little time I finish my task, and I come to the grand Amen. You ask me what I think of it in the light of the suggestion that it may have been written by the Lord. I tell you what I think of it: Its subjects are grand ; there is nothing frivolous as to intellectual conception in all these pages ; here we have audacity of intellect, sublimity of imagination, majesty of utterance, figure, symbol, and trope. If I look at its range, there is no book that claims to cover one ten-thousandth part of the area which this book claims to traverse and to bless. It goes everywhere, it speaks upon every topic, it hails every man as friend, it sings to every soul in the darkness, it makes great offers to every heart. Then when I look at its tone, how noble, how tender, how like a mighty oratorio—now vast as thunder, now trembling as a whisper of the heart. I thank you for your idea ; I should have been bewildered by the book, I should have felt it was a very grand and wonderful thing, I should have been respectful to it, but now that you suggest that it may have been inspired, I feel that it matches creation and is the only book that can match the firmament with its innumerable stars. Now that you mention it, it matches history. It is as wondrous as the human economy. I shall now retire and treat everything as if God were behind it, and had a meaning in it, and then I will say again and again after many a weary dream, Lo, God is here, and I knew it not ; this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

Benediction.

May Father, Son, and Holy Ghost claim us, abide with us, sanctify us ! Amen.

ORDER OF SERVICE, MARCH 10TH, 1901.

Voluntary ... ... "Andante Religioso" ... ... *E Cutler*

Anthem 1 ... ... "O worship the Lord" ... ... *Forbes*

The Lord's Prayer.—*Hawkins.*

Hymn 536 ... "How pleased and blest was I."

1st Lesson. Ezek. xviii. 20-28.

Chant 36 ... ... Psalm xxvii. ... ... *Crotch*

2nd Lesson. 1 Tim. ii. 1-5.

Anthem ... ... "Send out Thy light" ... ... *Gounod*

Prayer.

Hymn 195 ... "Where high the heavenly temple stands."

Sermon.

Offertory and Quartette:

"Cast thy burden" ... ... *(Elijah) Mendelssohn*

Hymn 215 ... "Hear us, Thou that broodedst."

Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod.*

Voluntary ... ... "March" ... *(St. Polycarp) Ouseley*

[THURSDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 28TH, 1901.]

I AM thankful to Almighty God, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, that I have been enabled to get through the service at least in some stumbling way this morning I cannot bear not to keep an engagement. All these years God has enabled me to be here, the appointed place, at the appointed time, with very few exceptions. I thank God for the supreme mercy of vigorous health. But now and then it does a man good to know that his grave is waiting for him, and that the engraver has taken up the tool to grave his name on the last stone page. All such reminders should be so many stimulants to do work with both hands and with the whole heart. The public are impatient with men who are in failing health. I know it. I never exaggerate either the importance or the insignificance of the public. But there are always gentle hearts, great, gracious, tender, fatherly, motherly hearts, and in their intelligent and experienced sympathy we find, under God, our strength and our comfort. May God be with you in all your afflictions, distresses, and conscious infirmities, and sanctify them to you, that out of your weakness you may gather a finer quality of strength.

[*Thursday Morning, March 14th,* 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we also appeal to Thy mercy. We dare not challenge Thy law, we may not defy Thy power, but we can cry unto Thy mercy, and we know that we shall be heard in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious. In that name we always come, for it is at once our prayer and our answer from God. Lord, have mercy upon us; Son of David, Son of man, Son of God, have mercy upon us! Surely we have another name, a name of blackness and horrible shame, yet because we are sinners, self-helpless, we cry, saying, Have mercy on us and give us what we need. We will accept Thy chastening because it is in love; we remember, when Thou didst accomplish Thy fury upon Thy people in the wilderness, that Thou wast turned towards them more than ever Thou wast turned against them. Thou didst wait to be called back; they cried unto Thee, and Thou didst hear, and roses grew in the wilderness. May we each pass under Thy rod, not a smiting but a counting, that Thou mayest know in the gathering of the shadows that every one has been enfolded on the high mountains of Israel. Put Thine arms round about us as a protection that cannot be violated. The Lord hear our daily cry and our special petitions, and magnify His grace over our sin. Amen.

CXXXI.

SEEING AND FOLLOWING.

"*Their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.*"—MATT. xx. 34.

BUT if they had their eyes, had they not their sight in that very fact? That is the great mistake which many persons make; having eyes, they think they see. The Scripture speaks of those who, having eyes, see not; having ears, they hear not; having hearts, they understand not. They have only the form, not the power; they have only the faculty, not the use. It reads therefore like a contradiction, "Their eyes received sight." Why, can you have eyes without sight? Yes; and you can have a human form without a human soul; that is to say, the soul is dead, dead in trespasses and in sins. Are not all men equal? No; those who are in the grave are not equal to those who are in the market-place or in the school; there is a difference, a deep and vital difference; and therefore we must come to something like clear and well-marked definitions before we speak upon any subject. To have eyes is not necessarily to have sight; to have a body may be only to have a cemetery in which the soul lies dead. Let us look at these matters as given in this beautiful instance.

Here is the greatest of all prayers: "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." We can do nothing until that great miracle is worked. It is just there that God comes in; after that, certain consequences will happily flow, but those consequences are impossible until a certain miracle has been wrought. "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." We have eyes, but the very possession of them is a trouble to us, because it is a continual mockery; our very eyes seem to be groping after the light, and cannot find it. "Lord, that our eyes may be opened." It is the

inclusive prayer. Give us our eyesight, and then we may learn how to do certain little things at least for ourselves; but we cannot do them until our eyes are opened, and there is only one power that can open them: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!

Prayer is educational. Always pray for the thing you need, and let the things you want stand on one side. To want is one thing, to need is another. Mere want cannot pray; true need can do nothing but pray, it must cry. If we have this great faculty of discernment, we can make some little progress. Discernment is the gift of the few. Discernment is the difference between one man and another. Some people discern nothing. They are such curious people to meet; when they go along the street they are always reading the wrong thing; you call attention to a very remarkable sign, and they declare that they did not see it because they were looking at a loaded cart. It is very hard work travelling with such people—unless they are responsible for all the expenses, then you may tolerate their want of discernment through that channel of recognition of partly indiscriminate kindness. We should all pray to get our eyes, our sight. All things are alike to some people. I am told, I do not know with what truth, that some people do not know even one colour from another. There are some people that cannot be trusted to put on their own garments, because they might put on a red with a yellow, and a blue with a green, and come out quite remarkable figures—a kind of amusement to the public. There are some people who do not know what it is to be able to see right relations in their house, in a dwelling room. It is not for want of money; they could buy anything that is to be sold; and yet their houses shock the senses of those who have the gift of discernment. Why, if those very things had been rearranged they would have looked beautiful; the right things were there, but they did not know how to relate them. There are others who never see when a picture is crooked; they never look at it. Well, I should not like to trust them with anything to do for me; I like people who look at things and study

things, and to whom a crooked picture is a pain. It means more than it seems to mean; it points to an inner quality and an inner faculty, and to a whole philosophy of discernment. I am dwelling upon these comparatively trivial things to show that some people have eyes, but not sight. There are others who do not know what comfort is; all the chairs they have are sloping, and it requires you to be in the very fulness of your youth and vigour to keep yourselves on them. I have gone to such places, and they have said, "Now, make yourself comfortable!" Well, I cannot; and all the difference is between setting it so and setting it thus; the things may be comparatively right, but the touch, the artistic touch, the artistic eye, the eye that sees the fitness of things is wanting. I was leaning over a fence protecting a garden that was simply growing rank with weeds; I said, "This is a poorly kept place." "Oh," said my friend, "I have no objection to this sort of thing." "Well, then," said I, "if you have no objection to this sort of thing you have nothing to fear in any world." I could not stand there half a second; every spike of that weedy grass struck me on the face and gave me real pain.

Yet there is a certain blessedness in being blind. These men did not feel the blessedness of it; they felt the pain and deprivation of it. Still, it is a beautiful thing, I believe, in some departments of life—political, social, and ecclesiastical—not to be able to see. A great bishop ought not to see too much; he should know that it is all there and going on, and be perfectly aware of it, but somehow not see it—looking up into the lantern of the court when expected to see a man that is standing on the floor. There is a genius in that kind of blindness, and he is a really wise employer and director who, having ears, only hears what he wants to hear. We are not speaking about that kind of deprivation, but the real downright deprivation of sight; and the men are now crying out a prayer we might all adopt—"Lord, that we might receive our sight!" Sight is the beginning of so much else. Our necessities seem to culminate in certain special experiences. A man that is blind cannot hear as he would like to hear, even though his physical hearing is perfectly clear; he cannot see the mouth,

he cannot see the lips; we can in some instances, both private and public, see the figure, the parable, the love, the moment the lips open. Some people could not hear a speech or a discourse if they did not see the speaker, that they might anticipate him and give welcome to the things they saw that he was going to say.

They "received" sight. Why did not they give themselves sight? Notice that word "received." It was through no power of their own; they had often rubbed their eyes, they had often touched their sightless eyeballs, but they had not that touch that would enable the eyes to receive the morning; they could only receive the kiss of the sun, not its smile. And we must make this a spiritual faculty, as it was a physical fact in the instance before us. We have nothing that we have not received. Is that so? Yes; and until you realise it you have no religion. True religion is an impossibility to your experience until you know that you are receivers and not originators. We are miracles of grace. The apostle says, "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" Art thou an eloquent man? thou art not eloquent of thyself, but thine eloquence explains some great act of reception.

See how large a class of blessings we have along the simple line of receiving, the blessings we have never asked for and yet hold in both hands. Have you counted them? You can count some of the blessings you have received; you can set them in order and number them and praise God every time you look upon them, but how many mercies are there we have received without asking for them? The unasked blessings—count them; there is a task for your reason and your imagination. You can count in some measure at least and with some approach to accuracy the blessings which you have received in answer to special and importunate prayer; but about the blessings that you have and never asked for? What a background God has in this relation; how much He has given us that we never thought of! Did you ask for the summer morning? It came before your consciousness was fully awake, it was ready for you in the sky; it

did not come in answer to your prayer, but in expression of God's love and care for this little world. Have you the gift of beauty? you never asked for it. Beauty is a trust; fame is a responsibility; a strong personality indicates peculiar stewardship. And yet no face ever made itself lovely; the loveliness is from within, the outshining not in form, but in expression—a marvellous creation every morning made in the very process of morning prayer. What hast thou that thou hast not received? And yet thou hast most things without asking for them. I want to cultivate that department of my life, I want to set down in order if I can all the things that God has given me without troubling me, so to say, to ask for them or to concern myself about them. Why take ye thought, even prayerful thought, for clothing or food? Why not give yourselves to some larger conception of things, leaving God to give all the things that belong to the process that flows from true and loving prayer? There must be prayer, there must be a conscious relation to God, there must be a conscious need. Until we know our deprivations we cannot really and truly ask God to supply our needs. That I may receive my sight! a man cried. It is as if a bird, wounded in one wing, should say, in some poor sobbing bird language, "Lord, that I might receive my outer wing; the wing I have is wounded, I want the other wing, without the other wing I cannot fly; before the wing was wounded I did not know I was so dependent upon it, but since I have lost the wing I can only flutter, I cannot fly." And so have I heard some poor depleted heart say, "Lord, I want the other heart, the heart into which I can empty this heart, and tell everything without a single omission or drawback." Well, but you have the green field, and the blue sky, and the purling streams, and all the gifts of summer. I know it, and I almost hate them, because I want the other heart, the mate-soul, that which completes all else, that dyes the earth a lovelier green and steeps the heavens in a more beauteous blue: I want my sight, my wing, my other heart, the one thing that makes every other thing, and without which every other thing is either a mockery or a burden; now I will plead with God for the thing I need; I see now that I may have

troubled Him with too many general allusions and promiscuous references, and I will go to Him for that other heart. But can He make it up? He can do all things; with man this is impossible, with God all things are possible, and I will talk to Him until He Himself becomes that other heart. Then I will arise and with a new psalm will break the heavens, and find its way through to the throne from which I have received all kingly love, all redeeming grace. People say, "Well, think of the things you have left!" But you cannot do that. Go to these blind men and say, Yes, you are blind, but your parents are living, and there are blind men who have plenty of money. Will not money make up for your loss? No, no. But have you not beautiful gardens? But if we cannot see them what is the use of them? You cannot make up that which is wanting. Everything is part of every other thing; and if the part is wanting the integer is turned into a fraction. You know what it is to realise that one thing is essential to give value to every other thing. Take your row of ciphers, make them into six triplets—now, have you not ciphers enough? Yes, I have ciphers enough, but what I want is the figure, though it be only one at the head of six ciphers, yet that one will send a thrill of resurrection, so to say, through all the row of the others, and each will stand up with a new value, and lift up silence into praise, and nothingness into gold upon gold, a million thick. So it is really no use talking to men about what they have left.

There is only one thing of use, and that is that Jesus Christ Himself should become the thing that is lost. He can do that, and doing that we forget the past in a dawning, brightening, celestial present. Shall we pray for what we need, and only for what we need? I would never pray about either wealth or poverty; we have nothing to do with these things, nothing at all; I have imagination, a man may say, and reason and gift of discernment; I do not want to trouble myself about whether it is poverty or wealth. I have been with Jesus, and shall I tell you what He said to me? Yes, you may. Well, He said this, and He said it in such a way as to make me believe it was true, "Seek first the kingdom of God and

His righteousness, and all these paltry things shall be added unto you." Did He say that? He said it, and He looked it, and He proceeded in all His handiwork to realise it. I have rested my weariness upon the pillow of His grace and promise, and when I wake I shall be satisfied with His likeness. Oh that we could do this! we should then be downright good souls, full of force and full of the truest ability, and we should become fountains of benevolence and beneficence to other people. This gives me quite a new view of life, and it is upon those views of life that we really live from day to day. Our hope is that every time we go to the sanctuary we shall get a larger conception, a clearer conception of what God wants us to be and do; and when that conception penetrates the soul we go out clothed with strength, and without that conception we are weak as other men. Only this week I heard of a man who used to attend here long ago; he was speaking graciously and appreciatively of what the service had done for him, and another man said, "Well, I should not have thought that that was the kind of ministry that you would have appreciated." "Oh!" said he, "it turned me from being an atheist, and now I am a Christian preacher." That is right. Oh, if God would give one that kind of reward—to meet a poor soul around whom the shadows were deepening and who was feeling that he was making a very rapid downward advance towards the despair of atheism—if any word spoken by the grace of God through these poor lips could touch a soul in that condition, and make him, as it were, see the loving God, that is the reward one wants—unspeakable, infinite. It is for that purpose we go to the sanctuary when we are dull and heavy laden, and despair is erecting its clouds around the very soul, so that the soul has no morning, only night; then to be able so to lift up the greatest conceptions which are given us in the Book and to let the light through into that despondency—that is one definition of heaven. And you preachers do not know how much of that kind of work you are doing. That man never spoke to me upon the subject, he spoke to another man who was wondering that he could appreciate this ministry or that ministry; he said, "It saved me from atheism." Blessed be the living God!

And here is the right use of faculty—"they followed Him." "They received sight, and they followed Him." That is the kind of action which we call the true profession of Christianity. It is not nominal profession, it is not an ofthand profession, but they followed Him. Why, they could see His footprints then. The joy of putting my feet into the very print on the ground made by Christ! Now that is impossible literally, but it signifies what is possible—namely, the spiritual following of Christ, the keeping on the road He trod, the doing of the things He did, the entrance into the very spirit of redeeming love. Are we following Christ? The apostle uses the word "follow" often. "Be ye followers of me." Now let us translate thus, which is perfectly legitimate, Be ye imitators of me: you see what I do—do this, watch me, repeat it; be ye imitators of me: a grand lesson in mimetics—doing over again. It is a great thing in our earlier religious life to have a strong man on whom to lean. Sometimes I have been thankful to say, Well, my poor faith is very much out of date, but my minister believes, and I get strength through his faith; I cannot see it as he does, but I know him to be a man of discernment and large view and keen intellectual penetration and great moral sympathy, and incapable of being false, and I heard him say, "Lord, I believe," and I said, "So do I." I could not say it directly for my own poor broken self, but I know that man, that apostle Paul, or that apostle John, and we can repeat after a man so strong and true; and thus men become helpers of each other's faith. The reason that some of us have not made a sufficiently deep religious impression is that we have been paltering with the thing, we have not been sufficiently definite. Many a man can follow a tune who cannot raise one. Now, if you would raise the Christian tune, the music of a real, practical, noble life, some of us would be glad of your leadership, and would endeavour to do what little we could to assist its consolidation and progress. Help us! Some of you may have been dumb until now—may this be the day of the opening of lips and the singing of the best music.

And here is recognition of the benefactor: "and

they followed Him." They did not follow the people who said, "Do be quiet, please, do hold your tongues." Neither of the blind men went after them. It was a poor den, but they followed Him—the one Man, the only Man to them. The first thing they saw was their Creator. The first vision that broke upon them was the personality of Him who domed the heavens and set them going in their infinite circuits. Keep near to Him, follow Christ. O listen with the ears of your soul, and you will hear in everything some tone of the voice eternal, as you hear in every shell some murmur of the great sanctuary of the sea. Listen well, and you will hear much. "They followed Him." Now, that is what we do, and we do it out of gratitude in the degree in which we are really appreciative and earnest. Why do you follow Christ? Because He hath done everything for you. Do you follow Christ nominally? I do, and I do not. Yes, if you mean do I love and magnify the mere name of Jesus; no, if it goes no further than that. Christ must become the Sovereign of the soul, the central force, the inner domination, the creator and purifier of true motive and purpose. That is faith, and that is saving faith. We are not saved through problems and their intellectual solution. There is a sense in which you may be congratulated if you know nothing about theology. There is another sense in which it may be said that you know nothing until you really grasp the inner meaning of theology. For we live and move and have our being theologically—in God. And what is theology when true but an interpretation of God and an application of all the ideas associated with that infinite name?

The Lord bless these remarks to us all; the Lord give us a sense of our blindness; the Lord give us a deep consciousness of our stumbling, for we are always walking in the wrong places and striking our feet against great obstacles. The Lord give us insight into the meaning of nature and grace and beauty and destiny. You need not go out of the Church of Christ for any one true thing. Poor soul, thou art blind! I will tell thee one little thing in one sentence: Take heart; once I was blind, but now I begin to see.

[*Sunday Morning, March 17th,* 1901.]

Prayer.

THIS is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven. May we know how to behave ourselves in the house of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth; may a spirit of reverence fall upon all worshippers, that they may worship in spirit and in truth, knowing that the Father seeketh such to worship Him. There is a rejected worship, a worship Thou wilt not receive; the prayers of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord. May we pray out of our reverence and conscious necessity and sharp pain and sense of need of Thy presence; then shall there come great answers of blessing like great rich rains of summer falling plenteously upon the inheritance of God. We bless Thee for the relief of prayer, then for its ecstasy; we thank Thee that the heart can whisper out its trouble, and then can speak more loudly, and then can begin to sing, and afterward rise into the rapture and transport of conscious communion with God. Thou hast led us by a way we know not; the way is Thine, the leading is Thine, and if we have shown any obedience to the leading, the obedience also is Thine: this is the work of grace in the heart, this is the miracle of love working upon the human spirit, bringing that spirit to renounce itself and look only to the living God for all it needs. We look, and, behold, to many of us our life is behind us, our company has gone on before. If we could not think of them as being with Thee according to Thine own will and grace, we should find our despair overpowering us as a great midnight of the soul. But we are drawn on by those who have gone before; we remember their example, the tone of their lives, their noble services, their glorious and God-glorifying examples; and as for ourselves, we will not think about ourselves, for there is none righteous, no, not one; all we like sheep have gone astray. But Thou dost love the world, and therefore Thou wilt not disregard the world; having given the blood of Thy Son, Thou wilt with Him also freely give us all things. So we have no frets and no worries and nothing that can disturb and corrode the soul; except, indeed, we have lost our faith or lessened it and fallen back into the cruel arms of the enemy. Oh that we may begin to pray again by beginning to serve Thee more thoroughly! Our service has been very poor and intermittent; it has displayed itself in moods of temper; it has not been the outgrowth of a great living, triumphant conviction of the soul. What have we done in

return for what Thou hast done for us? Our much is little, and our best is contemptible. We put our hand upon our mouth and our mouth in the dust, and we cry, Unclean and unprofitable! Show us, Lord, how we can do more in battle, in sorrow, in suffering, in showing an example to them which are outside and unbelieving, and thus work mightily through our poor character, that others, seeing our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven. Thou knowest all who are bent before Thee in true worship, and Thou knowest all frivolous minds and wandering attention. The Lord pity us, for we are but men at the best, we are still in the schoolhouse and still in the furnace of affliction. We think of those who are not with us because of old age, because of great distress, or because of bodily infirmity. God of love, Thou hearest the groaning of the world, none but Thyself can hear it and live. Thou hast redeemed the world, and yet it is groaning, full of misery, disappointment, and bitterness of spirit. The Lord pity us, or we shall utterly fail. Look upon the little houses where there is little comfort and much affliction, where everything is a burden, where there is no sunshine, even earthly and heavenly sunshine of love and pleasure and hope; places where the poor lie without ever seeing the sun; they have only heard of the beautiful things by report; of themselves, of the truly beautiful they know nothing. Look upon those who have no chances in the world; they seem to have none here and none hereafter; they have had no true love at home; they never were in a cradle, they do not know the delights of infancy and young budding, growing life; they have been born in misery, and they see no way out of it. God in heaven, hear the groaning of the earth, for it is a great trouble, a most unspeakable pain. Rebuke gently the self-satisfaction of those who think they are good and right in Thy sight—the Pharisees, the proud-minded and self-satisfied, those who think that because they have succeeded everybody else might have succeeded. O rebuke such unspeakable folly, and bring them by the way of affliction to know that gold cannot build out the devil The Lord look upon all our prodigals and wanderers; they are good souls sometimes, and they have fine aspects of character; they are generous and kindly and loving, but somehow the devil has both hands upon them. The Lord go with our prodigals that they may discover that even in the darkness there is a house of God. Hunt us, pursue us, never leave us, because Thou didst set up the Cross for us, therefore never leave us until we are won, and taken at the spear-point by the mighty, redeeming, only Son of God, to whom, with Thyself, and the Spirit blessed, be praise and glory, all crowns and dominions evermore. Amen.

CXXXII.

QUALIFICATION AND DUTY.

"*Fit to go out for war.*"—1 CHRON. vii. 11.

AM most impressed by the irony of the text I am about to announce when I consider my own weakness and unfitness. Never did man announce a text of which he himself was so pitiable a contradiction! It is "Fit to go out for war." The text is found in an almost wilderness mass and confusion of names. People are being reckoned up in their numbers and in their fitness for this sort of service and that, specially their fitness for battle, and we read, "All these the sons of Jediael, by the heads of their fathers, mighty men of valour, were seventeen thousand and two hundred soldiers, fit to go out for war and battle." It makes me ill to read of such health. Sometimes we are overpowered by the rugged robustness of some people; they are too much for us, they fall upon our weakness like great masses and burdens of things; we would be stronger if they were weaker.

"Fit." We must be fit for whatever the times are fit. Some have lived in controversial times; they have been fit for controversy, strong in argument, defiant in spirit, intrepid and courageous in the last degree. Others have been born in times of suffering, deprivation, persecution, and yet they may, by the mercy and loving-kindness and condescension of God, have been fit; the fight has gone out of them, but the endurance has come into their blood, and endurance is a kind of fighting. Some have had to show their Christian faith in mighty deeds of valour; it has been an action of the arm, muscular, long, felling arms. And others have fought in their own way with quite as much courage, though it was never in the journals, as any soldier in any battle ever displayed.

The courage of the sick-chamber overpowers and humiliates me; yet it is easier to die than to live. That should comfort us at the bedside, and yet that very comfort sometimes induces distress. It is the one who is looking on who is the sufferer. Did you ever think of that? The physical sufferer, who is just passing away down the gentle slope to reach the boat that carries souls over deep waters, does not suffer half as much as the people do who go away from the bedside into solitude and to tears, and then go back and smile at the sufferer as if nothing had happened between. It is a lie. This whole life threatens to be but a huge lie, black and mocking, killing with crueller stroke than ever fell on the brow of an ox. "Fit to go out for war and battle." Many have been fit to do that who have not been fit to simply sit down and suffer.

Now let us look at the text on the very highest level as expressing a great destiny, as fulfilling obediently, and with a kind of struggling joy, the destiny to which the Spirit of the living God has called us. No man is fitted except by the Spirit of God to do any really beneficent and lasting work in society. All true ministry is a divine vocation, whatever may be its name or its aspect, whether it is suffering or valour, whether it is writing or merchandise, or preaching or statesmanship; whatever it may be, the power or the qualification of it is in the fact that it is God's doing and God's holy will. How foolish they who suppose that life is a self-made machine; how utterly and hopelessly foolish those who suppose that all things are of man's doing, and that man can undo them. My brethren, man can neither do nor undo anything in which God has concerned Himself. "I shut, no man can open; I open, no man can shut." Oh these words of holy sovereignty! how they quiet the ages, how they turn midnight into summer morning. We are in the hands of God. What hast thou thou hast not received? Thy qualification is a divine qualification; therefore do not boast of it. No man who recognises God as the giver of gifts can ever be vain. The fools may think him such, but then they are fools. If a man has the gift of God in him, that gift displaces the fiend

or imp of vanity, and he who can do most of himself thinks least. That is the test of quality—the recognition of the fact that all things are of God, and that we cannot sing a song to a little child or to a great multitude, or preach, or devise great commercial or political schemes that have righteousness at the heart of them and truth as their motive, without feeling that God is in the whole arrangement, and that to accept human praise beyond a very small limit is to defraud God. This you will find as you go on in life. If you take all the praise to yourself, as if you had sung the song or written the book or preached the sermon or devised the policy, in that proportion will you gradually go down, and you will have no joy in the work because you ignore the Author, the divine, mighty Author. If we have great thoughts and beautiful, great as the sky, and beautiful as the trembling dew, and if we recognise all these things as the gift and work of God, they are doubled, they are magnified, and they become the very luxuries of the soul. Some men are fitted by experience in addition to the divine qualification or destiny. They have reaped in many fields, they have brought riches from many shores; their experience has been as a fleet of ships bringing in knowledge and wisdom, instruction and moral force from all the shores, all the mains, all the forests of the world. It is so difficult to get some people to believe that wisdom is more than one thing, it is so difficult to get people to believe that information is not inspiration. So many a well-informed man knows nothing about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of heaven is not a question of grammar, of words, of conceptions merely intellectual; the kingdom of heaven is a condition of the soul more than a condition of the intellectual mind. It is the soul in its right relation to the living God. Now experience will teach all men. Little children can have experience. If they touch the fire they will remember it; that is experience. The longest, abstrusest lecture on calorics will never so impress the child with the force of heat as one touch of the poker with the left hand. And so it is in morals. Those who have been divested by the devil

know what kind of poverty he can work in the soul, and they who have been so divested are fit to go out and reason with men who are on the fool's road hurrying to the fool's destiny. Without experience, what is our best intellectual sermon? It is something without rather than within us; it is a burden rather than a joy. If we have passed through all the sorrow and shame and pain belonging naturally and divinely to evil-doing, then we can be eloquent preachers; our words may halt, our sentences may be broken, but there is running through the whole utterance an eloquence owned of God, because created by Him.

Now what is the object or purpose of being fitted? What does it all come to? It all comes to service. What is the good of being furnished, fitted out, equipped, or whatsoever it may be called, if there be no definite and concrete end? We do not want ornamental faith or ornamental piety. Can he fight? Yes. Then bring him forward. Can he heroically suffer? Yes. Then produce him, where his influence can be most deeply and divinely felt. Can he exemplify the Christian character either in service or in suffering? He can. Then introduce him, mark him on the register fit—fit—fit. We have had enough of ornamental piety. How wonderfully some men have been equipped, and nothing has come of it. What education they have had. How many lecturers have you listened to? It may be six, eight, or ten. What good have they done you? You do not know. Then they have done you no good probably. How many fees have you paid to lecturers eloquent and ineloquent? Quite a number. What is the result? That is the piercing question. Do not ask a carving-knife on how many grindstones it has been whetted: ask it if it can cut. Are there not many men in all audiences who really have had more education than the teacher or larger opportunities than the mass of mankind, and who have just got learning enough to despise other people's want of it? What does it come to? Nothing. What a miscarriage, what a fateful and contemptible irony! You are not educated because you have been to ten schools, colleges, or universities; education is

a mystery of the mind. Many are educated who speak roughly and hardly ever saw a book or read one. There is a natural, a spiritual, an inspired education. Neither the one nor the other is to be despised; when they can be conjoined you have at least an approach to perfection. Here is a wonderfully great reader, yet nobody ever hears a word out of his mouth on any subject whatsoever. What a marvellous thing! You say this man is a great reader, a most voracious reader, a helluo librorum, a devourer of books. What does it come to? Does he ever preach in the Church? Never. Did you ever hear him giving good advice to anybody? Never. He has read all the books in his library, what does it come to? what does it amount to? What have you done for the Church, for the kingdom of Christ, or for the human family in any sense whatsoever? It is not enough to be polished, you must be useful. I heard the other day of a man leaving a million and a half, and the papers said there was nothing given to any charity. I must hear more about the case before I pronounce upon it. It is not always the wisest thing to give to charity; it may be under some circumstances a most wise thing, but I show unto you a more excellent way. I do not so much believe in a man leaving his money to charities as being his own executor, and seeing that every pound goes in the right direction. There was a great will opened some time ago, and there was not a penny to charity, but it was a grand will and a will that made me religiously happy. What was it? That all the people who had helped to make the mass of money were by that will created partners in the firm, —young men, men who were about giving up hope of doing much, middle-aged men, read the will, and the reading of that will made them all shareholders and partners in the vast concern, and that was right. These are the men that help to make the money, and therefore they ought to share in it. So I would have things arranged, so that those who helped should be recognised. "What," said I to a very industrious, economical, and well-reasoning woman—"what do you say, that your husband had a right to leave the money to his own people because he made it?" "Yes, I think so." "But he did not make it." "Oh, I

think he made it." "No, you did as well as he. I will not have the wife ignored; by her economy and thrift and good cheer, and by stimulating the man to go out when he would not have gone out, and by wisely managing the whole central administration, she made the money as well as you, I should say." *You* made the money? You did not. I have not one penny in the world that my wife did not make directly or indirectly by sunniness of temper, by good cheer, by impelling me in the right direction, by encouraging me to stand up to the mark and play the man. And then I am to be told that I am the bread-winner? Poor bread I have ever won! Oh no. You must be just. I hear a man denounced very much because he said that he did not care for the money, but he liked the making of it. That was not so very wicked an expression when you come to think of it. There is many a well-bred squire who cares nothing for the fox, but he likes the hunting. And so this great testator may have meant no more than that. I must know what he did with the money, how many people benefited by it, before I could pronounce upon that one sentence of his; I think the sentence rather good.

And what opportunities some men have had to do good, to speak a word for the right, to discourage an evil practice, and to vote on the side of justice, righteousness, and mercy. If you had put down your foot, that whole occasion might have gone just in the other direction. I blame you for the loss of that opportunity. If you had said "No," you would have turned the whole vote; if you had said "Yes," the corporation would have followed you. Christians should give strong leads; moral men, noble-hearted men, should speak the definite word, and in many cases it will in some manner or degree prevail. But so many timid people creep to the ballot and are afraid that anybody should know on which side they vote. I do not call that voting. I know you voted all right, but you did it in such a sneaking, fearsome way that really and truly it was deprived of all quality, it hardly counted; when the till came to be emptied your bronze was there, but it was only bronze, it did not burn the fingers of the men that touched it, there was no

soul in it. Fit, but not realising their fitness; reducing fitness to ornament. There are many ornamental soldiers. If you took off their clothes you would hardly know them to be soldiers; there are many wooden swords, there are many paper authorities and forces. The question therefore to be decided is this: What are we going to do with our fitness? Do not be an ornamental fool; do not be a highly ornamented, a lavishly painted nobody; but have a purpose, adopt it in the name of Christ, and for the sake of Christ, and at the foot of the Cross of Christ, and carry it forward unto fulfilment. Then you will recognise the true worker wherever you meet him. What a wonderful thing a Christian congregation is. I was really quite amused in listening to you just now singing that hymn we have concluded but a few minutes ago; how well some people shouted it, and how willingly other people muttered it! And I wanted just to whisper in their ears as they were going on —it would have shot them all dead as with a bullet from a musket—"That hymn was written by a Unitarian!" But what did you care so long as you did not know? It might have been written by a Mahommedan if you did not know it, you would have thought it all right; but if you had known it you would have sat down in horror and gone out in disgust. And several of our hymns in our most evangelical hymn-book were written by Unitarians. What we want to be at is this: to have our call in God, our rich experience and our qualification, in reading, in education, in money, or in opportunity, and then to bring everything to bear upon some really beneficent and useful result. He, according to the old saying, who makes two blades of grass grow where only one grew before is a benefactor and a true political economist and a wise citizen. Where is that second blade of grass, thou ornamental poodle? What canst thou say to God's judgment voice when He calls His servants to give an account of their stewardship? "Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." Shall we give him a testimonial? Are you going to invite him to a corporation banquet in your city or your town, wherever it may be? Come in, Ephraim, put down your bows. These are the bows you took out, are

they? "Yes, yes, these are the bows I took out." Then why have you brought them back? "It was very sultry, and we were not accustomed to the ground, and it was very difficult to walk there with the kind of shoes we wore, and, on the whole, we thought it better to come back and have a testimonial." And have not we done this very selfsame thing? We did not speak a word for the Master when we might have spoken; we were carried away by the popular feeling when we ought to have opposed it. And as for those of you who are trying to do good, to bring your accomplishments and advantages to bear upon proper issues, God help you and God bless you! We recognise you, we are indebted to you, the whole world is indebted to you in some degree. If there has been hard work, so much the more soldiery. Sometimes we were inclined to fall back, but we heard a great voice in the air, saying, "Curse ye Meroz! for he came not up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Curse ye Meroz!" That curse is a fire that will burn the chaff and the cowardice of the world. Have you ever spoken against intemperance? Have you ever spoken against ignorance or oppression? Have you never had a word to say for the Christ you profess to love? Think. If you have done something silently, that will do; if you have shown by any sign which side you are upon, God has been glorified, and God will honour you with His smile. That is the point. Hear this other man—his face a great sorrow, yet a great joy shines through the ploughed furrows, "I have fought the good fight." Mighty Paul, glorious apostle of the Lord Jesus, you have fought the good fight; it is time that you lay down and slept yourself away into the bosom of your approving Lord. I am afraid all I could say upon that would be, I have avoided many a good fight, I have let my opportunity slip by. I denied the Master, I said, "I know not the Man." If I did not say these things in words I said them in effect, in that subtle ministry of effect and impression. God made me fit to go out to war and to battle, but I hid my talents in a napkin. Many a soul can say, I have done nothing for Jesus—nothing, nothing.

[*Thursday Morning, March 21st*, 1901.]

Prayer.

WE rejoice in the experience of Thy saints, O God of our salvation. We thank Thee for enabling us by Thy Holy Spirit to hear the sorrowing and the singing of those who lived long ago. We bless Thee for undying songs, for the music that cannot be quenched, for the voices that come rolling through the centuries speaking of God and life, and pain, and hope—a mingled thunder, but full of music to those who understand the utterance thereof. We thank Thee for the goodly number of the sorrowing; their very number is a consolation; society in bitterness of soul helps to relieve the bitterness. It is our joy to know how many have suffered and out of what suffering Thou hast brought Thy saints in all the ages; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; therefore are they before the throne. This lifts up our souls, this bids us hope still in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement. We thank Thee for all the souls that have spoken about night, that have made darkness their poem, and that have walked through the valley of the gathered shadows straightway into the whiteness of the morning. May we join their company and share their hope, and be triumphant in their victory. The Lord give us a rich experience; the Lord give us a great song with great words; may we sing it so that it may be heard in heaven. Amen.

CXXXIII.

REASONS FOR PRAISE.

"*I will sing unto the Lord,* BECAUSE . . . ."—PSALM xiii. 6.

HERE is a reason for singing. The singing that has no reason is really not singing. Why do we sing? what moves the tongue to utterance? Is it because it is time to sing? then the song will be poor and formal. Is it because we are expected to sing? then will the very pith of the song go out of it. Do we sing because we cannot help it? then there may be strong, tender, heaven-seeking music.

"I will sing unto the Lord, because . . . ." What a wonderful misconception there often is about singing! I must hear the words, or the song is lost upon me; I do not know enough about the seven notes and all their interminglings to be able to dispense with distinct articulation on the part of the singer. Being but a layman on these matters, I said so to one who was singing to me unintelligibly, because I could not follow the words; and the almost resentful answer was, "Who cares about the words? it is the tune." Nay, said I, it is both, and I cannot get at the tune except through the words; I must hear every tone; then I can enter into the purpose of the music. When my hostile critic went to the greatest singing teacher in London she began her song; she had not gone more than a line or two into the song before he said, "What are the words? I must hear the words," said the German. "How do I know what you are singing about, or whether you are singing properly? I must hear the words." So to this singing man who comes to-day, who says, "I will sing unto the Lord," I say, Why? what are the words? we shall be delighted to hear your song if we understand your sentiment; what are the words? He gives us the words; we can follow

this wondrous, sweet-singing man because he pronounces every word without slurring a single syllable. Now let us hear these words and say whether this is an old song, or a new one, or both.

"How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord?" This is a line of experience worth tracing; this song is true to experience; therefore we wrote it and sang it and own it. We own what we absorb, we own what we appreciate; be it landscape or evening star or the first day of spring, which according to the calendar we have already reached, the bitter east wind notwithstanding: it is still spring, and spring will conquer. Here is a sense of being forgotten. It is a very homely word, but full of tears; it is a black jewel. Forgotten of God—passed over by God, not counted in the hymn of the infinite love. "How long wilt Thou forget me, O Lord?" The Lord once condescended to answer that question; He said, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee." Who can measure a moment? and then a small moment? and who can realise the meaning of the words until we proceed to the next principal term, "but with everlasting mercies have I gathered thee"? Here is sorrow of heart. What is it to be remembered by everybody, but forgotten by God? What do all these growing fields amount to? I will not put my sickle to such a harvest, for God has forgotten me. You have many mercies. I know it, but God has forgotten me.

How do you appreciate the song so far? Is this true to your experience? It is to mine. It may be only for a small moment, but there are small moments that seem to stretch from horizon to horizon. Who can tell the meaning of measurement or the significance of duration? All punishment is by its very nature eternal. Yet there be those gabbling non-experts who always trouble themselves about everlasting punishment or eternal torment. All torment is eternal. Eternal is not a term of duration, but of quality. See the bent old man; he says, "God has forgotten me; I have passed through great experiences alike of joy and of sorrow, but it seems now that God is tired of me, that God does not think it

worth while to bestow attention upon me; I am as a thing cast out and cast off, and there is no more song in the marrow of my bones." So it begins, do not stop the song until you hear how it ends. Things are all to be set in contrast and in relation, and we are to beware of that frivolous cleverness which prides itself on being able to anticipate what the end will be. Let us be patient until the very last tone has died away, till the very last note has trembled out of existence. Here is a man who has sorrow daily. "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?" It is that perpetual getting up to sorrow, coming out of sleep to cry still deeper and bitterer rivers of tears. The morning is at hand, the bright vernal morning; rise, O slumberer! And out of the dream-sleep there comes a cry—O how sad!—"To awaken once more only to be reminded that I am God-forgotten and God-forsaken!" That takes the sunlight out of the sky, withers the flowers, and chokes what would have been a song. Yet all the while this man is turning his eyes in the direction of the hills where the great sanctuary is—that great seven-hilled hill, that Serbal that has Sinai away at its foot, and still looks up and still hopes.

Is this true to your experience? It is to mine. I have turned away from the sanctuary and gone back to it on the same day. It is so easy to leave the sanctuary; it is so easy to take the hands off the plough and let the plough stand in mid-furrow, a sign of our disappointment and despair. But oh! the sweetness of going back again, and as it were apologising to the plough and kissing both its handles, saying penitentially, "Fool! I was asleep in the day, I neglected my furrow, and I have returned by the mercy of God to bless and resume the plough." Have we ever been in this bewildering and perplexed condition? Have you ever been an atheist and a true Christian on the same day? I have. I am often an atheist: blessed be the God denied, that He has not been towards me what I have been towards Him! The man has trouble in his soul; he has sorrow all the day, sorrow at the first, sorrow in the midst, sorrow at the end. And he comes to very

painful drinking when there is nothing to drink but the liquor of sorrow. How easy it is for those who are frivolous to despise those who are sorrow-laden and to say, "I wish you would get into a more cheerful tone." What is your cheerfulness but the devil's laugh? That is not cheerfulness; it is the mockery of true souls: would God you were buried out of sight who rebuke the sorrow of the psalmist and understand not the travail of the prophets! Do not be cast down by the worrying impatience of those who criticise you and tell you you are sorrowing overmuch. Such people never did anything for the world, and never will, because they never can. It is sorrow that turns the world into riches.

Here is a man expostulating with God. "How long wilt Thou forget me, O God? . . . How long shall I take counsel in my heart? . . . How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?" It is true that time itself bites our very souls; it is the How long? Terminate this hell! is the cry of the soul God-forgotten. Yet there be those who do not understand this wild distress; they would get away from it, get away to some laughing company, into some frivolous society; only give them a book full of lies, but highly coloured on every page, a new volume of slander, and every point in punctuation some sting of envy. All such people have never done any good for the world. They cannot stop in their own houses, they are gad-abouts, they are seeking amusement and frivolity and entertainment and merriment all the time, and the only place that does not know them is their own house. I call upon the seven angels of God to rebuke such unspeakable folly. It is part of the persecution of the saints, that they have to live with such people and be tormented by their utter want of heart. And yet these expostulations with God must come, the heart must have relief; sorrow's sorrow must tell its tale and empty its vessel of regrets, and wonders, and tears. What comes of this over-sorrow? There comes out of this overflowing sorrow a disposition to magnify the enemy, "How long shall mine enemy" —"Lest mine enemy say." Poor tear-blinded eyes! The enemy looks so big through big tears; these tears

are telescopes that magnify the enemy; he may be a poor little weazened thing in reality, but through our tears we see something elephantine, portentous, prodigious, monstrous. This is the telescopic effect of tears, which for the moment are atheistic. The enemy is not half so big as we think he is. I will tell you where I have got wrong, and you will answer me whether you have got wrong at the same point or not. In all these wildest distresses of my heart I have looked at "mine enemy," not at my God. We contrast the enemy with our weakness and not with God's strength. There are times when I have nothing to do with myself, but look away; remove the hills that I may see further; roll these intercepting mountains into dust and sand, and throw them into the sea, lest they interrupt my view of God. What can a man be or do when he is forgotten of God or imagines so? What can a man do when God's face is hidden? We have known recently how the earth has bitterly complained, and how she has added millions to the wrinkles of her face, because for many days we have not seen the sun. When the sun comes it makes all things new; all our troubles are magnified for want of sunshine; all our distresses are multiplied by the east wind. We are the creatures of environment and of circumstance to a very large extent, and a mighty man is he, a giant among the sons of God, who, when the environment is dead against him, can lift up his song or smite his harp with fingers that have music in their very blood.

Now the song will alter. The psalmist says, "But I have trusted . . .; my heart shall rejoice." "Trust" —who can define that term? What is trust, and who trusts, and is there any such thing as trust, deep, unquestioning, confident, self-forgetting trust? There is none. We lie to one another; it is a most horrible tragedy. Oh that we had never learned the trick. What is trust? Take an instance. A friend of yours is offended because of your conduct; listen to him: "I did not expect such treatment from him; I little thought that he could have been so near my dwelling-place and not have crossed my threshold; it was but the other day that he cast his shadow upon my windows; I thought better of him, but my soul has been

rebuked because of his foolishness; I am in great trouble." You go and see him, and hear his complaint, and then say to him, "When was it I was here?" "Only a week ago." "A week ago? I was in another country; I have not been near your dwelling-place for a long time; I could not come near it without entering it." "You tell me that you were not near at the time mentioned?" "I certainly was not." "Oh, I see!" Is that trust? "Oh, I see!" Is that theology? Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have trusted. That is what you must do with your friend. It is when you trust him that you show your friendship, not when you say, "Oh, I see." That is idiocy. To be able to say, "No, he never did it, he could not do it, I deny it," that is trust. But some people have to prove everything by affidavit or in solemn form before a court of idiots before they can believe. Then they say, "Oh, I see." Thou poor fool! To trust a man is not to believe a word against him until it has been proven a thousand times over. The man who trusts me will say on hearing any report unfavourable to me, "No, oh no! tell me the sun does not shine, or that the sea does not roll in its channel, but do not tell me that my friend has done a thing unworthy of himself, unworthy of his high calling." That is trust. Poor miserable little creatures, not more than five feet two inches, go about greatly distressed because Mr. This or Mr. That has done something which Mr. Somebody-else never thought of doing; and when all that is explained to them, they say, "Oh, I see." That is what you and I, poor infidel Christians, do with our God and with His providence and with His redeeming love. Everything has to be explained to us, and we have to thrust our hand as it were almost literally into the side pierced before we will believe. "Because thou hast seen Me thou hast believed: blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." That is the life of faith; that is the life I want to live. I cannot explain the mysteries, I cannot understand the miracles, I am lost amid gathering clouds of difficulties and inexplicable problems; but one thing I know, that I love the Saviour, and I am waiting for Him; and the moment He comes He will lead and I will tremblingly follow.

Do not trouble yourself about the authorship of any psalm. I have heard a great deal about that. Some persons really going off their food, so to say, because they cannot tell who wrote the hundred and fifty-first psalm, or the hundred and fifty-ninth. If they could find out who wrote it they would believe it. I read a thing and judge for myself, and I often find, as you will find, that I wrote it. We have all written this thirteenth psalm. There is the little scroll of parchment; now count the signatures. Millions, millions! Who wrote the psalm? They wrote it because they lived it. A great pity it is to see persons tilting their spectacles and wondering who wrote this. I say, What is it? read it to me, and I will tell you who wrote it. I wrote it, every word of it, or I will dip my pen in my heart's inkhorn and write it now in red letters. The psalm is not in the signature, the signature is in the psalm. There are many persons who would not read Shakespeare if they thought that Shakespeare had not written every word under his signature or over it, and if they did not believe that Shakespeare had dotted every i and crossed every t, they would have nothing to do with it. O foolish men! I do not believe myself that Shakespeare wrote a word of the wonderful dramas connected with his name. I do not believe that there was a man named Shakespeare who could pretend to be the author of these grand dramas. I believe that every one of them originated from the greatest mind that ever was born under the sun. But do I cast them away because I have been obliged to obliterate the name of Shakespeare? Oh no! I read them to see what God has made of the human mind, to see what fountains of eloquence He has opened, to see what skies of elevation He has created and burnished with planetary fires; I read these wondrous compositions to see how true they are to human nature, human experience, human motive, human action, human sin and penitence. Do not trouble yourselves because, like myself, you are not experts in these matters. If some people find a really delightful occupation in hunting up signatures and names, do not disturb such men; they have great uses to fulfil, and they are to be honoured rather than to be despised. But

nobody can take from me the twenty-third psalm; I have laid it up where thieves do not break through and steal. He who has a God that can be stolen has no God at all.

Now these are the words—what is the ending? "I will sing unto the Lord, because He hath dealt bountifully with me." He has turned the darkness into light, mourning into joy, and He has opened the prison doors to my soul when it was bound. Thus we must come back again and again, back to the old grand line of experience. What has this truth done for me? What has this interpretation of providence done for your soul? What is your testimony regarding life, taking it in and out, as shown in your own personality and as revealed in the personality and history of others? If you can say that all things are shaping themselves into a great temple built for God, you are not far from the Lord's kingdom. For myself, in these olden days, these elder times, when I want nothing on earth to do with anything any more whilst I live, I feel that God has so far made it clear that this poor little grey earth and these grand starry skies constitute a building, so to say, that is none other than the house of God. May it through the blood of the everlasting covenant become the gate of heaven. Thus shall we live nobly, truly, and usefully, and finally languish into life.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, and peace, the springtime of heaven, shine upon us and within us, a pledge of the nightless summer. Amen.

[*Sunday Morning, March 24th,* 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would this day be very near the Saviour, in whose name we humbly but confidently approach Thee. We would not see Him in the distance only, but close at hand; we would feel His breath upon our cheeks, we would feel His smile upon our hearts; we want to be very close to Jesus. Blessed be His infinite grace, He can be close to everyone: may we feel His tender presence now; may He speak to us in short words, may we understand every tone of His voice, may we feel Him to be a God nigh at hand, and not afar off. Blessed are they who can feel the throbbing of His heart; yea, thrice blessed are they who can hear His whisper to the soul, whether the soul be in joy or in distress, fighting a great fight, or entering into the inheritance of a great peace. We thank Thee for the men of old time who caught the Saviour's softest word; for the listener especially who heard His breathing and His sighing, and who took note of these, and has reported to us all His tender words. We bless Thee for the apostle John; we thank Thee for what that man heard and for what he has told us of his hearing, for we too through him almost recline on the Saviour's breast. We want to hear the common speech only, the great broad utterances to the whole world and to the congregated ages; we want to hear the softer tones, the milder sentences, the reduced thunder. To this end may Thy Holy Spirit prepare us to be good listeners; may we not listen with the ear of the body only, but with the ear of the soul: who can tell what we shall then hear? Take away from us all irreverence, frivolity, love of sensation and other expression of vanity and folly, and give us the reverent spirit, the hearing ear, the listening heart, that we may hear great things and most wondrous, spoken to our heart in our mother tongue; then shall this be a great day in the calendar, it shall be not the beginning of spring, but the beginning and the crown of summer. We need such days in this poor rugged life; days of depression we have in plenty, and those killing, sunless days when the great sun seems to have forsaken the earth. May this be the day of the Son of man, a day of light and liberty and far-off and near-at-hand music, so that the whole heaven and whole earth may be one great song of praise. We thank Thee for conscious forgiveness of sin; we still hear that sovereign, tender voice which said to us in the years long gone, Son, thy sins which are many are all forgiven thee. Then fell from our souls the burden and the pestilence, and we

began to sing songs of Thy love. Revive, we humbly pray Thee, whilst we tarry at the Cross, our best recollections, our early enthusiasms, the true passion of piety which made us men ; then we had no fear, no sense of being cast down, no blush of shame ; we were standing in Thy presence bathed in Thy smile and conscious that the battle itself was the victory. Pity us in our low estate ; sometimes the enemy has great power over us, we say, This is the hour and the power of darkness. But then the Saviour is with us more dearly and nearly still ; for He also was tempted ; once His bodily eyes saw nothing but the wilderness and His body felt nothing but biting hunger. He knows the wilderness, He knows the enemy, He knows our littleness and weariness ; then He will not utterly forsake us, but as the day darkens it shall also brighten, for Thou canst make it light at evening tide, and joyous when the harvest is a heap and a desolation. We bless Thee for all brightness we have enjoyed ; we await Thee to turn our sorrow into joy ; nothing less did Thy Son our Saviour promise us. He said, Your sorrow shall be turned into joy. This was His miracle upon earth, it is His miracle whilst He is in heaven. O come to this poor wineless Cana of our desolate heart, and turn Thou our very tears into wine for the soul's glad drinking ! Amen.

CXXXIV.

CHRIST'S APPROPRIATIONS.

JOHN XV.

WE shall find some jewel sentences in the fifteenth chapter of the gospel according to John. The expressions shortly to be quoted may be designated the Appropriations of Christ. He seemed to claim certain things, ideas, principles, emotions, as peculiarly His own. Christ may be said to be before us now as a great proprietor, talking so clearly, though not too loudly, of the things which belong to Himself. The governing word is "My." He goes as it were around the whole circle and places His claiming finger upon all the riches and all the greatnesses, including the comforts, of the whole heaven. We want to listen to this discourse ; it is not a

discourse that will take the trouble to force itself through our closed ears; it waits to be heard. When we have got over the vulgarity we shall come into the sacrament of true listening—great, grand listening. There are presences in which it would be almost a crime to make a noise, but these presences are human —God's presence is only divine. We want to create an atmosphere of stillness. The song is still going on, though we may have interrupted and spoiled it; it is no longer a high thunder, but it is a presence and an influence affecting and sanctifying the whole air. I have a book of jewels—shall I distribute them in the pulpit that every person may catch one of the gems? For the gems are so many that there is one for each, and so many more that there are thousands for every heart open to receive them.

"My Father" (verse 8). What a personal appropriation, what a claim to the whole fatherhood of God! Has this any natural similitude? Each little playing child on the roadside might say, "My sun," because the sun is so big and so impartial. I have seen the sun kissing a weed. Jesus said that God poured out His rain upon the just and the unjust, and His sunshine upon those who were far from Him. So He is Christ's Father, that He may be our Father. We cannot contain the best things in their entirety; they come that they may go, they pass through that they may leave a blessing and go forth to distribute the benediction to hearts that longingly wait for it. Here are six dear little children, offspring of the same parents: do they say "Our father" when they speak about their parent? No; each says "my father." He is not your father only, he is the father of the other five as well, is he not? O yes. Still the child says, "My father said," "My father thinks," "My father waits." What a very wonderful ministry this is of appropriation, a kind of personal proprietorship; and yet we know that it is not limited by any mere personality; only it is so great that it belongs to everybody, and so belongs to everybody that everybody thinks it belongs to him in some sense alone. This would never be said in words, this could never be put down on paper; nobody believes that the whole Deity exists for him; and yet there is a secret

affiliation and relationship which seems to claim the whole Trinity as a threefold jewel of life belonging to the solitary pilgrim.

"My commandments" (verse 10). That is a different tone. We never thought of commandments in connection with Jesus Christ. But when we really look into the whole matter we find that Jesus Christ spake more commandments than ten. We misinterpret the Christ; we think that He dealt only in benedictions and comforting assurances; we do not sufficiently realise that Jesus Christ really delivered the ten commandments with additions. This Man is not other than a King. He says, My kingdom, The kingdom of God, The kingdom of heaven; and "kingdom" means order, law, unity, responsibility. Who ever thinks of the Church as a kingdom, a government, having a King, a throne, a law? Yet that is the right conception of the Christian idea. We are not to be wanton and licentious, we are to be orderly, well disciplined, and to feel ourselves clothed with a very extensive and sensitive responsibility. Jesus Christ did not suggest, the Saviour never said, Would it not be better on the whole? He commanded, He largely employed the imperative mood; He turned the whole verb of life into that intense and commanding mood: Go, Come, Obey, Receive, Serve. We read the Gospels for comfort, we should read them for orders as well. Comfort is a species of order; as strength goes into the soul obedience comes out of it. What are the commandments of Christ? It is not unbeautiful to see the ten commandments of Sinai graven upon marble or cast in brazen letters standing somewhere in the church, it is a lovely and impressive sight; I want to see other two tables representing the commandments spoken not on Sinai, but elsewhere, on mountain sides, on the banks of rivers, in the midst of the sea. They should all go together; the cold marble and the hard brass take me back to Sinai and all the crags and lightning-split rocks; but is there no artist in flowers, cunning in the distribution of floral letters, who can write me the commandments of Jesus in the very flowers to which He Himself called my attention? "My commandments." "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is

that loveth Me." These would be beautiful words for a church, but they should be written in amaranthine growths in leaves that know no winter; they would be beautiful parables, they would be quick and tender reminders; they would make it almost impossible for the eye to see anything in the church to love like flowers. The flowers are the best teachers. They bring the resurrection and the life into my house every day. A friend feeds me with flowers, preaches to me in flowers, annotates the Bible to me in flowers. When I look at those lovely messengers of heaven, I say, Whence came ye? what is your speech? turn yourselves into my mother tongue. And they say they came from heaven; yet they seemingly came out of the cold black earth, and when I listen to their preaching, and there is none like it, I say, You have made heaven possible, you are the resurrection and the life—blessings on you! Let me kiss you that I may catch a new gospel from your lips. So it is with the commandments of Jesus; they are not to be set forth in flint, in masses of crag, but in flowers of every hue and every fragrance. The power that made the daffodil, the tulip of spring, can raise the dead. That is His proof. He who raised that lovely fragrant flower from the cold dank earth can raise the dead. He has a trumpet the grave cannot disobey. But who thinks of Christ's words as commandments? Said He once, "A new commandment give I unto you." Lord, what is it? "A new commandment, that ye love one another." Love by commandment—that is the mystery, that is the secret delight; love by a species of compulsion, love because we must love and because we want to love. Love is the end of the law, the summing up and the sunflower of the whole process.

"My joy" (verse 11). Why, He looks so sad! It is only the sad man that can be really happy; the lightsome, frivolous creature, all froth, never knew what happiness was—cannot know. Effervescence grows nothing. He looks so sad. That is because He is so loving, because He has such a quick and complete apprehension of all the conditions under which man lives. Look how He looks. He pities plenteous-

ness more than He pities poverty; He loves humility, He hates pride. He never called the disciples together that they might laugh; there are no laughing concerts in the sanctuary of Jesus. How we mistake one another in this matter of sadness and joy! We say of such and such a man, Poor creature, how unhappy he looks! It is the very nature of joy that it should have a background of melancholy. The wise man always looks sad, but there are occasional and never-to-be-forgotten gleamings of delight issuing through the dark cloud of the settled depression. This is not a world to laugh in; it is so constructed that it turns all laughter into hollowness. But what a world it is to pray in, to think in, to consider the nearness and the inevitableness of destiny! They are not always unhappy who are apparently sad. "My joy": a peculiar kind of delight, a special sort of rapture. It was this joy that carried the Cross, it was this joy that survived the nails and the spear; for the joy set before Him He endured the Cross, and counted the shame an honour. To enter into Christ's joy is the great purpose of the ministry of the Holy Ghost in the heart. There is nothing superficial in the joy of Christ; it is as a spring that comes up out of the rocks, a tonic handed to us from the fountain of blessedness.

"My name" (verse 16). "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name." That is the way to open the Father's heart; there is no other way. Not to bathe our prayer in the name of Jesus is to forget the true nature of prayer; it is to come with wild cries and ungoverned and undisciplined desires of our own. The Priest's name makes the prayer; we have an high Priest. Priest is a great word in human language; priest is a term filled with noble ideas; we may have perverted and degraded the name, but that is our doing. Man degraded Eden; sin degrades everything. But the word priest, taken out of its history in which it has become impaired and debased, is a great word, and Jesus Christ is not ashamed to wear the title; it becomes Him as a diadem. Have we filled our prayers with the Spirit of Christ? Do we feel that it is not we who are praying, but the Spirit of Christ that is praying in us? There be

those who need words, formal words, and they can profitably use words which have been created for them and set in order; there is another kind of prayer that has sometimes no words, a dumb prayer, a look, an expectancy that takes heaven by violence. Did you put the name of Jesus to that prayer that you say has never been answered? Did you put it at the beginning and in the midst and at the end? And did you speak it tenderly, with tears in your voice? Then you have been asking, if you have not received an answer, something that you ought not to have asked. There are questions that ought never to be put from man to man. We have no business to force our associates into confessions or reminiscences or protestations; we have no right to ask certain questions. There are some prayers that ought not to be offered; they hurt the answering God. All prayers offered in the name of Christ to which no answer has been returned—that is to say, no answer that can be traced and affirmed as an element in actual experience—we may well cross-examine and recall, that we may pray God to forgive them. There are prayers of ignorance and prayers of selfishness.

"My name's sake" (verse 21). The disciples were to be persecuted for Christ's name sake, because the persecutors knew not Him that sent the Son of God. But there is another use of the word which is most edifying and most pathetic. "My name's sake"; in another case He says, "For My sake." Here we come upon the supreme motive of spiritual action. Why do you go abroad to carry a Gospel to men you never saw, and whose words you cannot understand, and whose habits are shocking to you? Why go? "For Christ's sake." Why endure all this at home when you might, by telling one single lie, open many a door and get chances in many spheres at present inaccessible? "For Christ's sake." And why endure ostracism and sneering and social contempt, when you might by buying yourself a garment and robe of knavery sit down on soft cushions and breathe the scented air? Why? "For Christ's sake." Then you cannot be lonely, and your very ostracism is an honour, your persecution is a tribute to your honesty.

We only fail in service when we forget Him for whose sake we should do it. There are many men who are doing things for Christ's sake who never do them for their own; there are many men who are exposed to persecution and misconception and misrepresentation, and who are compelled to bear many social disadvantages, who do it all for Christ's sake. If we were governed by that supreme motive we should never be put to any inconvenience, we should never say, Give me the highest seat, give me the most precious honour; I am unhappy because that social distinction has not been conferred upon me. Why, if we were doing things for Christ's sake, all things would be under our feet, and we would have to stoop to touch the dignities of earth. We do not realise our privileges, we forget that we are sons of God; it has escaped our memory that we are a royal generation and a nation of priests unto God.

Here, then, is a great sovereignty, issuing commandments, orders, more than disciplinary; here is a great heaven—"My joy"; here is a great motive—"My sake." We cannot have the joy unless we undergo the discipline; the discipline is part of the joy. It is our service that makes our sleep a great gift of God. "The sleep of the labouring man is sweet." It is well-serving that whets the appetite which the fields of earth can hardly satisfy. Do you expect much joy? You may have some kind of right to it, I am not going to judge any man, but I would ask every man to ask himself this question: I am expecting the joy, but on what ground? have I done the work? have I been diligent, have I been an early riser in the Church? or have I always chosen some comfortable corner from which I could observe and pronounce upon the want of faithfulness in other men? We cannot have the joy until we have undergone the discipline. In social drill and qualification and equipment we have to undergo certain days of self-denial and training, when we have to have no voice in our own training, times when we have to stand still, arms down, and simply say, Tell me what to do. And there must be no disobedience. At such a time we give up what we call our private judgment; under such circumstances we

surrender what we call our independence. Cannot I eat what I please and drink what I like? No, not in this relation; if you want to do that, go. So that it is not in strictly and definitely religious spheres alone that we are put under discipline. "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me, and I will not call him servant or underling; I will call him friend, and he shall lie on My heart and hear its beating and interpret every throb as a gospel of love and protection." We cannot have the friendship unless we first have the obedience; that is the price of it. We pay, so to say, obedience, and receive friendship. There is only One whom it is lawful really and absolutely to obey; and there we stand back, and say, Lord, tell me the law; Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? Then where is your private judgment, and your independence, and your manhood? Gone, that they may come; denied, that they may be created and gratified in the right and noble and enduring sense. "I wish I knew more of the friendship of God." Have you obeyed His commandments? "I wish I had more real joy of heart." Have you undergone real discipline of spirit? You are pious at one end, and impious at the other, and this cannot be; He, the Man of God, makes it impossible. Oh, there are many who would be fed with the honey of the promises who have never gone out into the field that they might be made hungry by spiritual exercise and discipline and training. "I see it now, God be thanked; I see it better. I am told that if I would have the joy I must undergo the discipline. I receive the doctrine, though it be a hard saying. I am told that if I would have the friendship I must obey the commandments of Christ. I begin to see it now just a little." Hold on to that little, search for that little white cloud in the whole grey, gloomy sky, keep your eye brightly, intently fixed on that little dawn, that outline day. Watch, listen, obey, and by and by you shall go forth by the river where the twelve trees grow that bear twelve manner of fruits. The Lord help us! It is a hard road, but a grand ending.

[*Thursday Morning, March 28th*, 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have not seen Thee in Thy glory, but we have seen Thee in Thy mercy. We see not yet the fulness of Thy face, but we see Jesus. Meanwhile, it is enough, it is the divinest comfort. The image of Christ is before us that we may become beautiful in holiness as He was, may we keep the eyes of our love steadfastly upon Him, lest we forget His image and make images of our own. We would see Jesus every dawn and every noonday and in the evening star; we would that Christ might fill the vision of our souls, then should we be charmed as by a great delight and filled by an ineffable pleasure. We have done wrongly, we too have carved images and have set forth God according to the lust of our own imagination. May we remember that God is a Spirit, and that they that worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth. We have been destroyed by the material and the visible; we have been kept back from spiritual riches by vulgar delights; wilt Thou not send upon us as a plentiful rain the baptism of the Holy Ghost, that our hearts may no longer wander after other gods, but may seek Thee, the only true God, revealed in Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent? Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; may we enjoy that holiness of heart which sees in everything the beaming of the divine light, the very image of the divine presence. If Thou wilt grant unto us this humble request, prompted, we trust, by the Holy Ghost, then shall these days be brighter than summer mornings, and all the horror and agony of the Cross shall be overcome and driven away by the brightness of resurrection and the glory of infinite triumph. Amen.

CXXXV.

THEIR INVENTIONS.

PSALM cvi. 29.

OW often does the word "inventions" occur in the holy record? It seems quite a modern word, but in reality what is there that is modern? The whole text reads: "Thus"—as a thing done over and over again—"Thus they provoked Him to anger with their inventions," their tricks, their small novelties, their empty and futile devices. We do not make any graven images now; still, we may be credited with inventions, as we shall presently see. What are these inventions, under what name soever they may flourish amongst us? They are attempts to do without God, to put substitutes instead of the living Father, to displace the spiritual and ineffable by something that we can see and handle.

What are these inventions? They are attempts to supplement God. The Israelites did not wish to dethrone Jehovah. It would have struck them as a very curious suggestion if you had charged them with a desire to get rid of God; they would have replied that they had no such desire or intention, but they would endeavour to supplement the majesty of the Eternal: something that was nearer to their own hands they would like to be able to approach. It is so difficult to take in eternity, it was never fitted to the human nostril; and so difficult to take in infinity, it was never shaped and adapted to the human eye. So they would have something supplemental, something subsidiary, something of the nature of a deputised Jehovah. They, poor innocent creatures, did not want to unseat the King, they wanted to have some kinglings to whom they could talk in a way more or less familiar. These were part of the "inventions" of old Israel.

What are these inventions? They are attempts to relieve God. Why should such a God be troubled with the details of the case? Was it not enough for Him to hurl His universe into its place, without His attending to all watch-winding and clock-mending, and all road-repairing, and all hair-numbering, and all sparrow-watching? Would it not be better to have some adequate committee, if such could be constituted, that would relieve the Eternal of all these small and fugitive matters? Impiety is not wanting in cleverness; the devil was never short of invention; he could whisper into the ear of the soul, Why should God be troubled with everything? the kings of the earth have their deputies, why should not the King of the heavens? and therefore why should you not seek to supply Him with lieutenants and representatives and high secretaries of state? Why trouble the Ineffable, the Immeasurable, with such small things as registering in His books every sparrow that falls, or numbering the hairs of our head? Some such arrangement as this would relieve the King; why, it would be a species of help to Him, and He would recognise it as such; and thus we should get in, in some stealthy, and pestilent, and fatal manner, our own inventions.

What are these inventions? They are attempts to supplant God. At first they come in to relieve Him; by-and-by they create traditions of their own; presently they will create vested interests; later on they will say, Why, what evil have we done that we should be dismissed the service of mankind? And thus, little by little, imperceptibly as the grey hairs come, they would seek to supplant and really and blasphemously to dethrone the living God. And these inventions are alive to-day, every one of them, and a thousand more, graded, shaded, adapted, and refitted according to the movement of human evolution.

What has been the opinion of God about all these inventions? That opinion is given in the text—"They provoked Him to anger with their inventions: and the plague brake in upon them." God has cleansing days, great ventilating shafts which He opens now and then in the cumbrous process of all this human evolution; so He calls in the plague, and says, "They are past entreaty, pray for them no more, let the

plague go." And then we wonder where the plague came from, and what we have done to provoke this uproar and upset of the ordinary commonplaces of life. There is always a moral reason even behind an earthquake.

With what subtle questions the mind is plied! such innocent questions, such very natural, and, as it would seem to us, such very proper inquiries. Thus: "What were inventive faculties given for? There is a very subtle question. If they were not meant for use, then what were they meant for? Here we are with imagination, with high fancy, with great mechanical and other skill: do you mean to tell us that all these faculties and powers are to lie dormant, and that God had no special intention in giving them to us?" We listen, and think there is reason in that inquiry. I could shape a little image, a man says, and I could so shape it that I should like it, and I should so like it that I might sometimes think it was a god. It is all over! An image has been caught beyond the image, and the man says, This is not idolatry, it is ideality; I have a quick and kindling imagination, and I could through that dear little face see the Divine Being; that is the effigy of God; I will bend a knee to it, and one day I may bend two; meanwhile it helps me wondrously; I can see light in those eyes; I can almost see that nostril curve as I look at it reverentially; I will not allow anybody to dust that little idol but myself; I will make a favourite of it and diligently attend to it, and it shall dumbly talk to me. And presently you shall find this same maker of images prone before the work of his own hands; and God is credited with having given the inventive faculties out of which the little nothing came!

Then the question comes, may we not really honour God when we try to define His will? Of course we do! We want to see to-morrow, and therefore we will make singular arrangements; we will gaze into this crystal: I think I see destiny there, I see the movement of forces and the uprising of empires and the change of fortunes: O what wondrous things I see in this little crystal! I will fill up the tumbler with more water, and set the crystal so that the light

can strike it at the right angle, and then you will have no difficulty whatever in forecasting the destiny of empires. And God will be pleased with us; He will say, These dear little creatures of mine are trying to find out what I am going to do, they are trying to discover what will happen about the middle of the century which is just dawning, and it is very natural that the poor little dears should want to know what I am going to do in a quarter of a century or even in five centuries. This is reverential; this is not dishonouring the Church of God; certainly not, but it is simply, as it were, subtly and remotely, but certainly and fatally, doing without it. A man says, I shall devote the whole of next Sunday to this little tale-telling crystal; I have counted all its facets, I have learned all the prismatic variations of colour, and I am sure that if I look long enough into the centre of this crystal I shall see what is going to become of me in a few years: I call it worship, I call it reverential attention to the Divine will, and I am sure that God cannot be angry with me for thus endeavouring to break in upon His solitudes. O hear this great voice: "They provoked Him to anger with their inventions; and the plague brake in upon them," and the air became one throbbing, palpitating poison. Don't you see how easily and gradually people are led into the very depths and darknesses of idolatry?

Now "their inventions" sometimes take curious forms and expressions—as lots, coincidences, omens. Sometimes we have given way to these tricky and apparently innocent temptations. An omen! I heard a voice, I heard no words, but I heard a voice, and it seemed to be a calling, an inviting, seductive voice; something I am sure is going to happen, because the omen was so distinct and so delightful and impressive. And then I had such a wonderful instance of coincidence after coincidence, so that I could not but construe the whole thing into an aspect of providence; it happened at a similar season of the year and under similar circumstance, and absolutely without calculation or forecast on my part: and all these coincidences and parallels fell together and went forward at equally settled points, and I am sure there is something going

to occur ; I cannot rid my mind of it, and therefore I think now there can be no possible difficulty or harm in our reverting to the old thing called the taking of lots : will you cut me two similar pieces of paper, and I will write No upon one and Yes upon the other, and I will scatter them before me on my desk, and I will pray with shut eyes and with clasped hands to the Invisible, and ask Him to tell me which of these pieces of paper to take up, and when I have read it that will indicate the Divine will. "Man was made upright, but he sought out many inventions." We are led away from simplicity; we are led away from restful truths. We tempt God. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." All thy way is marked out for thee, poor soul; all that God asks of thee in return is simple, loving trust that, come what may, God's will, if we rest in Him, will be done at His time and in His way ; it may not be my way, it may not be thy way, but the Lord will in His own way surely provide. Yet it does suit our peculiar temperament that we should be troubling the Deity with a dice-box. What did He put it into our minds for, and to make dice, and to make the box, and to throw these figured and pointed pieces on to the table that we might determine certain issues by numbers and faces? This is surely more than a human thought. What are we looking for ? We are looking for God, and we are looking for Him through lots and the dice-box and certain arrangements and manipulations of our own evil imagination : and it will take the whole Trinity to get that out of us. Verily, we are spoiled gods—self-spoiled. There is about us a dignity and a life occasionally which affirms our sonship in heaven, and then a malignity, a meanness, which confirm and establish as a fact our depravity and our horrible loss in consequence of sin. It does seem very tempting that we should find out God's will by certain omens and coincidences and casting of lots and throwing of dice; it does seem as if there might be something in it. And I hear as plainly as Eve ever heard the devil saying to me, Try your luck on this dice-box; why, the moment you throw the dice and go by it your eyes will be opened, and you will see everything, and

be as it were a sort of minor deity: try it; what possible harm can there be in it? It is casting lots, if ever that was permissible; for the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord. I remember the poor left and lost apostles cutting up lots and praying over them, and the Lord allowed them to make their own election. They were taking the place; it was Christ who said to Simon, "Follow Me"; it was Christ who said, "Follow Me," to another and another and another; "Follow Me"; it was His voice, and we are trying to do without it or to substitute or to supplement it; forgetting—what?—the greatest fact in history, that we are not under the dispensation of the Spirit, the Ghost; and the more weird the Ghost, in the scriptural sense of the term, the nearer are we to God. We have to overcome our own bodies, and fight them to the death in order to get into heaven: whereas if our souls were under the dominion of the Holy Ghost there would be no outer world, there would be no brick walls, there would be no tempting expressions; we should live in the disembodied, in the ex-carnated, away out yonder where the light is without a cloud.

"God made men upright, but they have sought out many inventions." How long shall we delude ourselves with the notion that we can make ladders long enough to climb up into the sky? I own that I have now and then seen a ladder against a brick wall, but I have never seen a ladder against the Pleiades or Orion, or the evening star. There is a point at which ladder-building is of no use; you have to build something else before you can build the ladder, and then the ladder is only of use in the degree in which the first building is accessible. Ah me! it gets hold of my very heart. The devil was with me all the dark hours, saying to me, Sir, if you will only have courage enough, you can build a ladder by which you could scale the moon. I know it is a lie, yet I half believe it sometimes. I say, Surely this is not the voice of the loving God, and yet if I could just build a ladder long enough to touch the ridge of the moon, the periphery of that calm lady-named orb—I wonder if I could! And the devil says, Yes, it is perfectly possible

for you to do if you would simply resolve upon doing it: what you have to do is to play the man and build a ladder; begin the ladder, because this is one of those things that can be done only by beginning to do them. The old lie! He cannot invent a second.

What is God's view of all such invention? We have that view in the text, and in Psalm xcix. 8 we have "Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." He wrung their necks, and dashed them to the dust; He has swept out all these god-houses and invention-museums and ground them to powder, and He will do so again, and all your lots and omens and coincidences and shadows and table-rappings and table-turnings and all your miserable inventions, which are lies from the beginning to the end, because they spring out of a lie. The apostle in Romans i. 30 says, "They are inventors of evil things." Good things do not need inventing; evil things suggest themselves for incarnation and expression, and the evil things sometimes have falsehood enough in them to say, If you embody us, if you incarnate us, you will do a world of good by showing what evil really is if properly interpreted. Oh, the devil can suggest all kinds of inventions to his victims and his prey. Of all the things perhaps ever invented, the supreme instance is given in the great book of Ezekiel. The son of man was bidden to take instruments and dig down a hole by the side of a wall—Dig deeper, son of man; and the son of man digged deeper, and as he digged he came to a door, a door in the wall. The devil said, Open the door, and go in; and the son of man went in, and beheld such a sight as never scorched and frightened the eyes of man. He went into certain places called chambers of imagery; round all the walls were figures and emblems of things evil; every lust was painted, every forbidden desire was imaged, all the devil's tricks were shown forth in pictorial semblance. The Lord said, "This is what Israel is doing, this is the meaning of the iniquity of My house." Brethren, the great moral is that we cannot dig deep enough to build out God. It is not within human skill to find a darkness so dark that God cannot pierce through it. You know the old fable in the writings of Erasmus in which the tempted

man asks for a dark place, for a more hidden place, and when he gets to the place which he cannot get beyond he says to the woman-devil, Can God see us here? That one question was like a lightning flash that cut the darkness in pieces and made midnight brilliant as noonday. We cannot bury ourselves out of God's sight; He is as familiar with the bottomless pit as with the immeasurable heights of heaven. If I say, I will take the wings of the morning, and flee into the uttermost parts of the earth, the first thing I should see upon the new shore would be my old sin gripping my hand and grinning its hell in my face. All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. But we dig no deep places and open no chambers of imagery. We do, just as much as in the old time, but in a new way, in new forms. Every age has its own note and comment. But we have no inventions now. Yes, we have, but we call them by a new name. What do you think we call our inventions now? Excuses—the same thing, the same old badness. Do you keep a little marble image of the Deity in your closet that nobody ever looks into but yourself? Oh, no, no; I am no idolator. Take care, take care! Do you ever make any excuses for not worshipping the true God? Take time! I can obey the commandment which forbids me to make any graven images. I quite believe it, but you may be all the worse for that. If a man would put his inventions into brass or into marble, and set them in a row, and say, "These are mine idols," I could have some hope of him; but he obeys the second commandment, he will not make unto himself a graven image, poor dear innocent man, he would not make a graven image of anything that is in heaven or in the earth or in the waters under the earth, not for the world, he says; he attends missionary meetings where he smiles at the people who make idols away under distant trees and away in tropical climates. Oh no, he would never do so. And that man's heart is a nest of excuses, a nest of foul birds, that he dare not name. But he is no idolator. In saying this I take a two-edged sword and thrust it into my own depraved and corrrupt heart. We tell lies in our prayers, we gratify ourselves by our very genuflexion. We are not honest with our own hearts.

Then whence is the cleansing? There is only one answer to that inquiry. Only one power can cleanse the heart and bring us back to holiness, simplicity, and real sonship in the household of God. All this has to come out of us by blood, by the precious blood, by the redeeming, atoning, priestly blood of the Son of God. You cannot wash this uncleanness with soap and water; all the rolling rivers you can find in the whole landscape of the globe cannot touch this kind of disease. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth from all sin. I will throw myself down upon my very face before the Cross—mournful, glorious Cross!—and I will say, Son of God, cleanse my wicked heart; create within me a clean heart and renew within me a right spirit. It is a divine action. We have soiled the robe; we cannot wash it; we must go to Him who clothes the saints with white linen—white—the total unit of all the colours. We must go to Him, and as poor, weak, penitent, broken-hearted souls must ask Him to wash us that we may be clean, and to take away every stain of evil that we may by the blood and power of the Cross one day be white-clothed and walk with the saints in white. It is a great mystery, a solemn tragedy; but, my friend, my kindly listener, it must be done,—and the sooner the better.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us that we may get rid of all our inventions and simply fall into the arms of Christ. Amen.

[*Thursday Morning, April 11th*, 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee that all things are in Thine own hand, to distribute according to Thy wisdom and Thy grace; may we accept the distribution as expressing Thy love; though we are overwhelmed by the mystery of it, may we remember that within the mystery lies the solution, all pity and wisdom and tenderness. Thou hast given to every man a portion, to every city a lot, and to every empire a destiny; may we remember that all things are sealed and certificated by the sanctuary that is in the midst of them. The Lord give us an eye that can see the altar in the cloud, the flame in the night-time, and the sign of God in the clouds of the summer day. The Lord establish us in the faith that all things work together for good to them that love God; may we never meddle with the providence of heaven, may we accept the Cross as sealing to us all good things and pointing out to us all right ways. The Lord keep us from intermeddling, from question-asking, from foolish and fruitless anxieties; may we believe in the living God, and rest in that faith as men rest under a roof which no storm can violate. We thank Thee for Thy house amid all the tempests and all the changes of life; it is a bright dwelling-place, the pillars of it rise unto heaven, the corner-stones thereof are laid in the righteousness and wisdom of God. Help us to cling to the Cross, that we may see all things come to a harmonious and blessed issue. The Lord help us to keep our hands off, lest we degrade and blench, the altar. Amen.

CXXXVI.

THE IDEAL CITY.

"*And the sanctuary shall be in the midst of it.*"—EZEK. xlviii. 8.

T is a wonderful context. A portion for Dan, and a portion for Asher, and a portion for Naphtali, and a portion for Manasseh, and a portion for all the twelve tribes. All this amounts to nothing, but when I come to this expression, "and the sanctuary shall be in the midst of it," the allotment of portions of land seems to be a very tender and comforting award. I want to modernise the instance, and think of it as a city rather than a land that is to be divided, and I want to think of an ideal city, whence it comes, how it is constituted, and what influence it exerts on itself and on neighbouring cities and countries. The subject might well be called Religious Radiation—a glowing light in the centre, and a wonderful diffused radiance stretching out to the circumference and overflowing it, and as it were falling upon other worlds, as the sunlight must surely do every day; for wise men tell us that the sun sheds light enough to illuminate a great many more worlds than this poor little thing which is called the Earth. Let us think of it therefore as an ideal city, an ideal company, with the sanctuary in the midst of it—the sanctuary the main thing, the all-seeing and all-dominating thing; all the rest falling away into shade, into perspective, the one glowing lamp being the temple of God.

"And the sanctuary shall be in the midst of it." This need not startle us unduly; we come here somewhat suddenly upon a great philosophy: this is how all things are moulded and ruled and blessed. It is so in the case of the individual heart. It is a poor life that has not the sanctuary in the midst of it; it may be invisible: God

is a Spirit, and not to be seen; to see Him is to annihilate Him. How poor a life it would be without the unseen, the invisible, the throbbing, trembling life just inside a palpitating veil. What is our life? Is the altar its main ornament and its principal force? Is the altar the centre of our life, a centre without which there would be no life? Do we take all our laws from God, now on stone, now on flowers, now on drops of April rain? Do we live and move and have our being in God? You have no life if you have not the altar or sanctuary in the midst of your very heart; without that your life is a kind of haphazard game; you will try this and plunge into that and adventure the other. A poor life that is degraded into a gamble! O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; have a secret altar, an oratory in the soul's soul, a window clear as crystal, through which you see the city celestial; then I shall hear no more of your atheistic and foolish talk, whether the markets are up or down, whether you can go to bed with any hope of sleep; you will no longer be at the mercy of the devil; a sanctuary is in the midst of you; it is your first thought, your brightest thought, the poet of the soul; you have bread to eat the world knoweth not of, you feel that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God; though there be ten thousand times ten thousand, thine shall be feeding words, bread words, banquet words. Oh that men were wise! What we have to convert is the Church. There is a great deal of anxiety, properly and naturally so, about what are called outsiders: what if the insiders be the outsiders? Ay! what if we should get up a great mission for the conversion of nominal Christians, people who are trying to walk in cold iron, and cannot? They beat the anvil, but make no shape strong and beautiful. It is I, poor preacher, it is I that must be converted. One day's dew does not wash the face of to-morrow. So it is also in the home life. If the sanctuary is not in the midst of your home, you have no home. I am not describing form, mechanical rules and arrangements; for I do not believe in them for all people, though I am bound to believe in them for some people. But the sanctuary can be in the midst of the home

without any pretence being made about its presence; we need not publish the fact, the fact will publish itself, publish itself in the face, in the tone, in the touch of the hand, in the grip that means gracious mastery. It is a poor house, utterly mean, that degrades its own furniture, that turns its own mahoganies into the plainest wood that grows, that has no sanctuary, no quiet hour, no time of sacramental silence, no spiritual masonry. There is a salutation that means a prayer; there is a way of being civil that builds a church on the hearthstone.

Think of a house without a sanctuary in the midst! Do not accept my definition of sanctuary, you are not bound to accept any man's definition of that holy word, but you are bound as a man standing upright, with some touch of majesty about you, to have a secret sanctuary, a place of holy communion, from which you must for the moment banish your very dearest one that you may see One dearer still, and see that dearer One with the vision of the heart; then you are master of the day. There are so many persons that are half-upset, whose very tone becomes fretful, whose look has an interrogatory in it that means suspicion or fear. There are people who dare hardly open their own letters. Why? Because they either have no sanctuary in the midst of their home life, or that sanctuary has lost its hold upon them, or they have been doing something to jeopardise the holy influence of that sanctuary. What is it? Art thou Ananias, Sapphira, Achan? Dost thou belong that gang of traitors and liars? Until you rebuild the sanctuary you will have no real comfort in your house, but if you have a sanctuary in your house I do not care how poor the furniture is, it will glisten with a special cleanness, there will go out of a portion of it, as it were, an acceptable fragrance, the very perfume of a self-sacrificing heart, and the house, though little, just one room below and another above, shall be the dwelling-place of the living God. Try it. If the sanctuary has its right place in your house you will have no quarrelling and bickering and evil temper. I know what it is to have a home out of which we can shut the devil, a sweet

altar, sweet with the perfume of invisible flowers, a holy coal burning in the grate, out of which there comes a voice, mystic as the eternal throb, it may be, the throb of the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob. Why, even your house can be as mine in the days when love bloomed like a sunflower, if we can only establish the sanctuary in the midst of it.

And so it is in life's daily business; the sanctuary must be in the midst of it. Why, there are poor creatures that could not afford to come out on a Thursday morning at twelve o'clock; they say they could not afford it. Why not? They are bad calculators. I am speaking of those whose time is largely at their own disposal. They have never tried to afford it. How can I afford to put this little handful of corn into the wet, damp, dark soil? If I were a wise man I should ask, How can I afford to keep it out? We would get greater things from God if we leaned more upon Him, and turned our faith like a face laden with expectancy towards the kind heavens. Time is never lost that is spent in doing good or in getting good. No man ever lost half an hour of his life by going in the right spirit and for the right purpose to the sanctuary of God. We are such poor calculators; we take the bronze because it is bigger than the gold, and we are befooled and victimised by size. Let a little child do that, and it will be well; the child thinks it is a big wheel, and takes the bronze because of its bigness; the little one knows not yet what quality is. So it is with us; we mistake the values and proportions of things. And a man is in such great haste to get away to his business, which only means, unless there be a high spiritual tone about the man's very soul, that the business will one day go away from him. A curious life, a singular life, a ghostly life! Oh that men were wise! And so the altar must be in the City. The sanctuary must be in the midst of it. You know the wise people of London—it would be a pity to be small in so vast a space—are taking away the churches. Poor churches! all sorts of denominations and sects. They say that people have gone away. Not an inch! People are where the bread is, where the bread of life is; not where a paper about the bread of life is read, but where the living bread itself is to be seen

and handled and received. They say there is nobody in the City on Sunday, because they are not there. I wonder how far that is true—that because I am not in the City on Sunday, therefore there is nobody in the City; I do not think it will bear examination. Where you supply the bread, those who are hungering for it will come. And they will find out where it is, and how much it is, and what they can do with it. This is the word of the Lord that abideth for ever; and to see a city dismantled and all its great religious testimonies and proofs taken away, why, that is nearly as bad from another point of view as the fate of Sodom and the doom of Gomorrah.

I want to speak to some of you who have forgotten the old days when you lived above the business. Never live above your business; you know in what sense I use the word "above" there. When I see a man who is too fine for his business, I pity the business that he ever touched. Never be too fine for your lot; if need be, clean your own doorstep, set out your own window, and never be ashamed of any honest way of making honest bread. I want to see the City of London with a great sanctuary in the midst of it, a sanctuary not representing Romanism, Anglicanism, Dissent, or whatever else you may call divisions of a religious kind, but some great, grand human altar to which every man can come with his broken faith and his broken heart and his dumb imaginings about things that hover above the clouds. It would be a beautiful sight.

Did Jesus Christ ever say anything about this matter? Yes; He spoke upon every subject under heaven and above heaven. He gives you exactly this idea of the sanctuary of God being in the midst of the heart, the home, the business, and the City. He said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." What would He do? He would put the sanctuary in the midst, He would make the sanctuary and all that the word sanctuary implies the main thing in life. And I tell you that unless Christianity be the main thing it ought not to be in the life at all; it

is the supreme truth, or it is an empty pretence and disappointing mockery. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God." Then He said, speaking from the same point of view, "Out of the heart proceed murders, adulteries, blasphemies, lies, and all manner of evil," —out of the midst of the heart-city. He does not treat these things as symptoms, as instances of being off-colour, but says, when He looks upon the black, fœtid stream, This has come out of the heart, the heart is full of loathsomeness, if it be not filled and penetrated by the saving grace of God. On another occasion He spake on the same subject. He dropped a parable, and that parable still remains. He said, "Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good"; put the tree right, and the fruit will be right; put the sanctuary in the midst, and you will find all things on the circumference gradually becoming right and beautiful and helpful to others. O brothers of this poor flesh, how poor a thing it is to treat human nature as suffering from symptoms, when the thing is dead in trespasses and in sin! Hence you have people walking round the dead thing and prescribing a little for the head, for the feet, for the limbs, for this or that feature of the individual constitution. All that ever came instead of Christ were thieves and robbers; "I am come," said the Saviour of the world, who broke His heart that ours might never break, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." A kind physician has in heroic story, I believe in literal fact, put the lancet into his own vein that he might pour a living current of blood into some poor dying creature. That is what Christ did in a still higher and grander sense; He shed His blood for us, into us, all round about us. That is the Gospel which we have forgotten or are liable to forget—that weird, wondrous Physician stabbing Himself and pouring the torrent of His heart into our desiccated veins. Tell the world that. "Fly abroad, thou mighty Gospel!" Go to all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature:— Jesus shed His blood that we might live.

Then said Jesus Christ in one graphic and all-comprehending sentence, "Ye must be born again." Nicodemus, Rabbi, master in Israel, stand up and

hear this saying, the like of which never pierced thine ear before. A man must be born again, must begin over again, begin at the beginning before the old beginning, get back into the eternity of God, that he may come forth into the time of duty and service and safety and sacramental suffering. This is how Jesus Christ taught His people ; He just said the text over again, "in the midst of the sanctuary," "in the midst of it." The right thing in the right place. What is it—O tell me, tell me—to be painting the house when the foundation is rotting? What is it to be insuring the bricks and mortar when your soul is dying? What is it—fool, say; wise man, tell those fools what they are doing; and let the voice that proclaims the sanctuary be the greatest voice in the City, in the country, in the empire, in the world. It is a poor trickster's life that has not the sanctuary in the midst of it. They may get up all their functions and demonstrations and banquetings and fools' feastings, and try to make a little foam on the surface of things; but all these actions are so many deceptions and disappointments. Hear this sweet voice that comes along the ages, it is the only voice worth listening to: "Ye must be born again." Christianity works from the inward to the outward, not from the outward to the inward. Man likes to work from the outward to the inward. He is great at plasters, great at decorations, great in furnishing houses. O that thou couldst persuade the man to decorate and furnish his heart! Nothing can stop this down-plunging world but the coming in some mightier form than we have yet known of the Son of God; the monotony is becoming a blasphemy; there must be, and soon, some further and brighter epiphany and manifestation and outshining of the Divine glory and purpose. How it is to be, no man knows; when it is to be, no man can tell; but we ought to operate in our prayers and services and sufferings under the thrilling influence of the Lord's own assurance, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

There are those who help their worship by much that is floral, beautiful, æsthetic; with them I have no fault to find What helps a man nearer the divine and the invisible I would bless if I had the power

to pronounce a true benediction. But never let us forget that all these external beauties and aids mean that they are pointing to an issue infinitely larger and more significant than themselves. Have you heard? "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." When I think of this poor weary old place we call London—the most distressing object that the stars can look upon in many aspects, for they are always pulling it up and putting it down, and grumbling while they are doing both—it seems such a weary thing; they cannot get the pipes laid, and no sooner does one set of pipes get laid than another set of people come to dig up all the ground again and put another set of pipes alongside them; and you cannot go out without being frightened by some evil-looking almost creature crushing and growling and groaning along the thoroughfares. It is a wonderful place for living on itself, eating its own vitals, and otherwise making all the population uncomfortable, and yet in some sense more comfortable than they could be anywhere else. What I want to see is the organised Christianity of the metropolis. People are unbuilding and upbuilding London. I would like to unbuild and upbuild the Londoner, the man. It is right that we should have people who cannot find any rest to their souls until they take the asphalt up again and repair the side walk; it is right; but it is still more right, more largely, profoundly right, that we should be improving the London man as well as the London town.

I would see the Christianity of central London organised; I would have in the City of London a visible attestation of the presence of Christ and of the power of His Gospel. I would have London policed in a new way; I would have all good Christian, shepherdly hearts at work night and day. I would have music in the middle of the day, when men are resting from their labours, just to give them a hint that there is another world, a summer place, where the air is full of melody. I would have at every street corner a vigilance window, so that no thief could get along without the fire of a detective eye being upon him; and I would have the cruel man hunted out in his miserable retreat and dragged in the

light and whipped in the name of the womanhood to which he has been cruel. I would have every little child know that it has several fathers—the father at home, and the father in the Christian public, and the Father in heaven. There should be no one afflicted with a sense of orphanhood; there should be provision made for all loneliness and destitution. I should make the devil have a hard time of it in London; I would make the air balmy with Christian supplication, and the streets carrying the footprints of those who go about doing good. And I would in this work engage all the churches, and if any church said, "I will not subscribe to your idea," then I would say, "You are not a church." If a church likes to unchurch itself, so be it; every man has the liberty, not the right, of suicide. Think of a great mid-London mission, with its offices, its vigilance arrangements, its purity committees and appeals; think of a whole city being affected from centre to circumference by the sanctuary that is in the midst. This would be Christianity in action. It must never come to pass that one man is handing to another over the pew top a paper upon the difference between himself and somebody else, with long words and subtle definitions and a thousand weeds brought up from the fourth century, in order that they might be watered and kept in a neat green dish for other fools to devour as the ages come and go. Why, all these heretics are dead. I do not want you, as my people, to be so many Burkes and Hares going about in the night-time stealing the bodies of dead heresies and giving them to some people to dissect and sell in new arrangements, and then call it preaching. That is not preaching. Preaching is a great mystery with thunder in it and whisper, with judgment and tender, dewy mercy. So for this let us pray and let us work, that in the home and in the business, in the City, in the empire, and in the metropolis there shall be in the midst the sanctuary of God. Then London will be young again, and full of noble influence, and there will go out of this London an influence that will be felt on other shores far away in other ages yet to dawn.

[*Sunday Morning, April 28th*, 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have come into Thy presence from many places, but with one desire. One thing have we desired of the Lord; that will we seek after, that we may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever and inquire daily in His temple. We would have no resources of our own, we would live upon the sufficiency of the Divine plenteousness. The river of God is full of water, our sufficiency is of God; we would have no self, we would only live and move and have our being in God. It is our joy to know that Thou canst answer all questions, give all needful wisdom, open every gate, and lead the blind by a way that they know not. Oh that we might no longer sacrifice unto our own drag, nor any longer fall down in homage to our own net. When wilt Thou complete the wisdom of Thy grace in our poor souls? We have so many inventions and designs and plans of our own: how wondrous would be our joy if we could renounce them all, and simply fall on Thine eternal arms. Thou knowest our frame, Thou knowest our littleness, Thou knowest we would be better if we could; therefore Thou wilt not despise us in anger, Thou wilt stoop to us in pity, and speak a word in season to hearts that are weary. Lord God of heaven and earth, all hearts are weary; there is no depth in any gladness that is not in Christ, it is a poor joy, a rising, dying bubble; but they who live in the sanctuary and tabernacle under the altar shall have abiding peace, conscious and continual rest. Some time we knew not this, these were strange words to us, and we despised them all; we thought things were outward and visible, tangible and attainable; now we have come to know that all things are spiritual and inward and divine, and that the things which are seen are only outward and visible sights. We are better since we knew this, our whole life is deeper and fresher; the Lord be praised for our knowledge of the nearness and divinity of the spiritual. We bless Thee that now we see things more nearly as they are; we now see that the bread is Thy body, Thou Son of God, and all the water the outpouring of the love of Thine own heart. We now see everywhere blood that saves: the flowers bloom in blood; all things worth having are the purchase of blood. Now we see the true high meaning of the Cross and all the dripping of its red stream. We have come to ask Thee many blessings, but we shall have them all in one: grant us, we humbly pray Thee, Thy Holy Spirit—the new spirit, the blessed temper, the sacred sacrificial

disposition, the ennobling impulse and all-consummating purpose. We will not mention our sins, for the time would fail us to tell of sin and crime, ingratitude, pitilessness, neglect, and all the wonders of our disgrace: but where sin abounds grace doth much more abound. We will sit on the green shore of the eternal and infinite sea of Thy grace, and forget the black pebble that is sunk in the depths of Thy ocean. The Lord hear us, mercifully comfort us, pity us, and give us uplifting of heart, that we may begin again just now and say that through the Cross of Christ and the infinite priestliness of His Atonement we have come upon a day that is birthday, wedding-day, summer day. Amen.

CXXXVII.

THE ONE HELPER.

"*The Lord God will help me.*"—ISAIAH l. 7.

FOUND these words when I needed them much in Isaiah, chapter fifty, verse seven: "The Lord God will help me." We might write this on a signet ring and stamp with it all the record of our life. There are times when we need just these simple daisy texts, spring-violet texts. They seem to have no cubic depth, and yet when we come to live them there seems to be room in their infinite space for the heavens and the earth. Sometimes little things are great things; great things are always little. Sometimes we get all we want in one sentence. That is the beauty and that is the satisfaction of what are called sermons. No man wants the whole sermon, but he wants some little text, sentence, apophthegm, that he can remember perfectly, and that will go with him like a singing bird through all the seven days of the week. Sometimes the text is its own sermon, and indeed when a text is its own sermon it is the best sermon and the best text. I want therefore to be rich ot only in great tropical blooms, but in home-grown aisies and daffodils, violet and laburnum texts, that I can carry about with me, so that I can have a garden of the soul. This is peculiarly and distinctively one of

those texts, and it came to me yesterday when I thought the heavens were darkness and the earth a swamp.

"The Lord God will help me." I like the sound of it; there is a voice that is all music, a voice which, though we have not heard it before, we recognise it at once, saying, This cometh from eternity, and is the music of God. Some texts do not need to be expounded; they call for meditation, they are a sort of Lord's table text. No man comes to the Lord's table for a disquisition upon the Atonement; the Lord's table is not formally theological, though there is nothing but theology in it when theology is correctly, divinely interpreted. Sometimes we come for a quiet meditation, an interchange of heart-feeling, a kind of experience meeting, wherein, without formality, we come to understand one another, and to be the stronger for each other's life having touched the other. This is a text, therefore, at which we can all meet as at the table of the Lord. Who wrote this text? The ages, the centuries; they wrote it, and such are the texts that cannot be torn away from us. Find a very difficult text, and we know not who wrote it, nor care we; but find a little rosebud text, and we feel that everybody might have written it who has been in the Lord's secret and met Him within the whispering of the altar. Who wrote this text? I wrote it, you wrote it, every soul that has been helped in broken-heartedness wrote it; it has a multitudinous authorship, it expresses the quintessence of the experience of the accumulated ages. There are some things we never ask about as to their inspiration, because we feel the inspiration. "God is love" is in no need of a treatise; it is its own treatise, its own dictionary, and its own comment: yet it is the most difficult verse in all the world. "The most difficult verse in all the world?" Yes, I said those words after thinking about them; there are no three words you can mention to me so great as these. "You astound me." I am glad of it; the Church needs to be astounded, the sleepy ingrate! "God." What is the meaning of that? No man knows. Pity we have ever been taught to utter it with the lips only, because the lips have cheated the heart. A man

says "God" as if he were uttering a commonplace: whereas it is the climacteric word in all language. "Is"—what is the meaning of *is*? No man knows; it is the verb that absorbs all the other verbs; *is* holds all the moods and all the tenses, lending itself to variation, but still claiming for itself the sovereign suggestiveness and reality. "Love"—who knows what it is? No soul; we know the symptoms of it, the more or less obvious and transient relations of it, but love is the secret of the universe. Open every star, to find love written on its heart; open every flower, to find love in every vein of the living evangel. "God," inexplicable; "is," inexplicable; "love," inexplicable; but if I may but touch the hem of the garment of each, I shall be a better man. That is sense; that is all we can do in time and in the body; we can touch the hem of the garment, and in that hem there throbs the eternity of God.

"The Lord God will help me." What is help? No man knows; we have attached certain marketplace meanings to the word, and we think that is all. When will we give up attempting to explain things? Things are worsened by being explained; all things are vulgarised by being opened out and explained. We owe much of our darkness, our intellectual and spiritual bewilderment, to that *ex*—out of, from. We want to be more lovingly familiar with the *inter*,—that which is going in and feeding the soul, and doing so without scholastic and formal explanation and lexicography. What is help? No man knows, yet every man knows. The sentence is not self-contradictory, but mutually explanatory. We know many things, most things, without knowing them. There is a wondrous instinct, intuition, kinship; sometimes we have come to an innumerable company of angels, in their singing robes, and we are ravished by the ineffable music. Do you know what it is to come to the innumerable and to the perfect and to the Blood that speaks better things than any other blood? Have you touched these highest experiences? Have you seen any glimmer of the lamps of the city?

A great swelling and singing of heart comes sometimes to us when we say, "The Lord God will help

me." Sometimes we realise ourselves, and those selves are often a thousand strong, in one grand rush of feeling, one upheaval of ecstasy; all the angels are at our disposal, and the whole cabinet of heaven yields its jewels for our using. These are ecstatic periods, sacramental occasions, transfiguration moments. It is something that now and again we realise the whole genius of the Divine purpose in the creation, maintenance, and redemption of things. We are not always equally triumphant, but sometimes our weakness is our strength; we would not be half so strong if we were not almost pitifully weak, because it is then we lean hardest on the Divine strength. So long as there is a little throb of self-sufficiency, the system cannot be utterly sanctified and almost deified. God must get out that last faintest pulse of self-conceit before He can begin to be what He is, and He is love. Love cannot get wholly in until the conceit gets wholly out.

"The Lord God will help me." This is a proved fact. I have proved it, you have proved it; yet we could not explain it. Coming to my work the other day, I almost fell down in utterest faintness in view of the terrible shedding of blood that was to come, but a friend in my own house, strong in the simplicity of faith, said, "Strength will be given you at the time." It was a gospel sermon to me; it rebuked the baptised atheism from which we all suffer, and set me on my feet to try again to do God's will. Why do we not all openly and distinctly bear this testimony to the Divine grace?—"I was weak, and He helped me." We hear that, and are thankful. "I was brought low, and He set me upon a rock." To hear that sweet testimony makes our hearts glad. Tell us something more, and let the house of Israel say, that His mercy endureth for ever, and let the redeemed of the Lord say so. There may be silent piety, there ought to be also a resounding testimony. I could not be an atheist without first committing suicide, because I have seen the Lord in the house and in the field, in the valley, and on the hilltop. If my religion were an affair that could be written out on a sheet of paper, I might lose it, but so long as it thrills and reddens in the blood I cannot live without

breathing it. If your religion is only something that you carry as a weight, it will never do you any good. Your religion must become an experience, a very sacrament and triumph of the heart. I should have to force my way through years and years of experience before I could get outside the Church and deny the Lord; I should have to trample upon my own self —a miracle not difficult of accomplishment in some cases. I should have to deny myself before I could deny my Lord. That is the strength of the pulpit, that is the explanation of the force that rules the world.

Consequently, the text is not only a proved fact, it is a continual inspiration. We can fall back upon experience; we can say, "This or that happened to me." If we can only say, "This or that is reported to have happened to some other man," we have no faith, we cannot have faith. We must be able to say that such and such deep joys, thrilling sacramental experiences, have been realised in our own life. This is how young David talked. "I will fight the Philistine." But thou art only a child, and no fighter. "I will fight Goliath." What justification is there for such a challenge? "I was keeping my father's flock, and there came a lion and a bear, and they took a lamb, and I rose and caught them and smote them, and tore their jaws in twain, and I am not going to lose that fact: the Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He will enable me to deal with this uncircumcised Philistine." This was good reasoning; this was deriving inspiration from the past. Exactly the same answer ought to be possible to every one of us. You have killed a lion, you have killed a bear, in some form or other—a difficulty, a loss, a drop-down in your faith, that only could be recovered by, as it were, wrestling with God in the night-time and telling Him to His face that you would not give in. The Lord loves such violence; that is the violence that taketh the kingdom of heaven by storm. Are we going to throw away the experience of all the ages? Is it nothing to us that men have striven and prevailed in the name of the Lord? Why should we be so wantonly wasteful in this matter of experience?

The Lord's Church is not built upon books, but upon lives, upon men, upon immediate and provable experience.

The text therefore is not only a proved fact, and a continual inspiration, it is, finally, a sufficient rest. You are going to do such and such work: how are you going to accomplish it? And you say almost in musical cadence, "The Lord God will help me." You have already won the battle; the victory is not in the fighting, but in the spirit of the fighter. When does the Lord God help His people? Under three conditions. First, when the work is His own. "The servant of the Lord" is speaking here—that mysterious personage that seems to pervade Isaiah and give personality to every word in the glowing prophecy. He comes to do the Lord's work, and he says, "The Lord God will help me." If there are none of the people with me, it is no matter; if I am left alone, the battle will still be won; I represent, speaking as the servant of the Lord, the Sovereign of heaven. We must not get up little works of our own and say, "The Lord will help me." Whatever works we get up must be done in the spirit of God and for the sake of Christ and in the very temper of the Saviour; then the work will be well done; some night we will fall down into the sleep of the weary, and in the morning when we awake we shall arise in a finished temple. The Lord puts on the topstone; the Lord lays down the foundation stone; the Lord builds every course between the foundation and the pinnacle, but He allows us to think that we are doing part of the work—only the great can be generous. And, secondly, we have given up self-reliance. That is almost a miracle. We think we can do something. When we come to know that we can do nothing we will do everything that God wants us to do. Even this depends upon the spirit of renunciation. The renunciation must not be made in a spirit of haughtiness or resentment, saying, "I am formally required to give up myself and my efforts, and therefore I obey." In that temper you will receive nothing; we must do the Lord's will in the Lord's own spirit; even Christ pleased not Himself. To be nothing is the way to be all we can be. And, thirdly, which,

indeed, is a division of the second point, the Lord helps us when we have completed our faith by giving up our substitutes. We sometimes want to personate faith, to set forth something as if it were faith. The Lord will receive no proxies, He will burn all shams, He will have the naked soul in the perfectness of simple reliance upon Himself, and then He will say, "Son, thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee." And God cannot forsake a forgiven man.

Let us bind this upon our hearts as a jewel or string of jewels; take it as if it were all the jewels of God in one great precious stone. "The Lord God will help me." We hear it from the ages far gone; the old, old men said this, and they never lost a battle. Did they not lose a battle when they were burned? Nay, it was then that they won it. One bishop said to the other when they were about to be burned at Oxford, "Brother, we shall light such a flame in England as can never be blown out." These men did not die, they could not die; the bush burned, but was not consumed. Have we done anything to show that the Lord has helped us? I rejoice to say that many have. I have seen instances of suffering which have not been turned into public interviews; I have known heroisms in little thatched cottages that the historian, technically so called, never heard of; I have seen women stronger than seven men. I have seen a man bowed down to the grave and crushed into tears, and the woman has come and looked on, and got a new wrinkle in her face, but in her voice there was no complaining against God. I have seen people rise to testify that God has been with them in desolation and poverty and utterest stress of weather. No one was there to relate the incident or turn it into a quotable anecdote. I have almost seen the plough of grief force itself through some faces and across some cheeks, yet there has been no complaining, but a magnificent silence of endurance and acceptance of the will of God. These are the testimonies that we go by. Some man has discovered that a book of prophecy or other book has been written in two different inks, and he has made an argument upon that, an argument that has nothing of cogency or pathos in it. In my own poor

life the Lord has written in many coloured inks, mostly red, some black-red, blood-red; but the testimony is the same, the revelation does not depend on the ink-horn. It is a question of spirit, proved pathetic experience. On that foundation Christ builds His Church.

I am glad to be back again, at least for the time. Yesterday in a great silence I said, My ministry is done, there is not another text in the Bible. I just opened the old, old friend—that wonderful study Bible—like this, "And the Lord God will help me" was the first word I saw; and then I saw six texts one after the other like six angel voices, and they bade me be thankful and take heart again. This is God's way, He will not have you gather too much manna at once, He says, "There will be more manna to-morrow, and to-morrow you have never seen; I will find both the morrow and the manna." So let us journey on. It is the Lord, it is not man.

Since I last met you I have lost one of my almost habitual Sunday evening hearers in the person of the late Dr. Tanner. He was a Catholic in the morning, and he was himself in the evening. A right cheery, broad-hearted man, full of wit and humour and humanity, he had always a kindly word for those who welcomed him at the doors; there was nothing of the "Stand off, I am better than thou" about Dr. Tanner. It would be well if those who saw only his peculiarities could have seen his geniality, simplicity, kindliness, and sweet manliness. Thus one by one the crowd will decline, and one by one the gaps will be filled up; for the Lord Himself governs the succession of the generations.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us always, help us, till we set up our final Ebenezer. Amen.

[*Thursday Morning, May 2nd,* 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee that we are in Thine own house. Thine eyes are upon us; our hearts are searched by Thy looking. This is a terror to us, yet this is our chief joy. Thou knowest the heart; there is not a thought in our heart, there is not a word on our tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. Help us to speak for Jesus, to make our lives expositions of His grace, and comfort us exceedingly, we humbly pray Thee, in the time of trouble and sore distress. We thank Thee for all the solaces of the Gospel, we bless Thee for all the proofs of the Christian faith—so many, so various, so cogent. We dwell in them as men dwell in temples of rock when the wind is blowing and the storm is raging. The house of God is in the midst of the houses of men; the tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth. We lean our houses against Thy sanctuary; we overhear the sacred psalm and the word of grace and wisdom, convincing and comforting the heart. We have had many years of experience of Thy bounty; the river of God is full of water; Thou never failest; to-day and to-morrow are Thine, and the third day, which is the day of perfecting. Wilt Thou come to us now pentecostally, with a great message, with a renewed and enlarged benediction, with new visions of the Cross, and new interpretations of the redeeming blood. So shall we be exceedingly comforted, yea, and lifted up where no storm blows. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Three in One, One in Three, we worship Thee, the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of man. Amen.

CXXXVIII.

STOPPING PLACES IN EVIDENCE.

"*What need we any further witnesses?*"—MARK xiv. 63.

ET us take this in a way that is not usually taken; let us regard the question as equal to: Why not stop the case here? why add to the edifice? That is an illustration of what occurs in our own day in many a legal instance; the judge inquires whether the jury cares to proceed any further in the matter, and the jury notifies to the judge that they have heard enough, they have made up their minds, and so far as they are concerned they wish an end to be put to the case. I have thought that this might well apply to Christ and His Gospel, the question being asked, not with a view to the condemnation of Christ, but with a view to His being accredited and glorified as the Saviour of the world. Why call any more witnesses? why publish any more volumes of apologetics? is not the case proved? why add to the witness, the testimony, and the vindication? I think Jesus Christ is entitled to have this question asked. What more do we want than we have already had? Take the case at any point, and you will find stopping places in the evidence. That is my theme to-day, a pregnant and most fruitful theme—the stopping places in the evidence that the revelation which we possess is sufficient, complete, final. I want every one to feel that he is not called upon to master all the evidence. Who then could be saved? It does not fall to the lot of every Christian man to be a completely equipped apologist of the Cross. You know something, you are convinced at some particular point, you say, "Why go further? this is enough for me." I am personally now not teaching that a man should go no further; the whole area of Christian evidences is before him, but there is no need for him to traverse it all; he might well say, Enough, I sit here, I stand here, this

is my plea, my vindication, my rock, and my refuge; that there are not more evidences it is not for me to say, but I cry out at this or that particular point, as the case may be, What need have I of any further witness or witnesses? have I not heard enough to inspire me, comfort me, and instigate me in the working of a great policy of life and conduct and spirit?

The mischief is that any man should imagine that he is called upon to be the encyclopædia of Christian evidences. Believe me, no man is called upon to sustain, so to say, that character or function. We have to reach the point which gives us personally enough, sufficiency, fulness of proof and blessing; so that I can conceive it perfectly possible that a man should say, I have been watching Christ, I cannot understand Him altogether, He is quite beyond me, but I have seen enough of Him in His daily walk and conversation to convince me that He is the Messiah, the Sent of God, the Saviour of the world. Clearly understand that this does not mean that the man may never go any further; he may go the whole length of the line if so disposed; but let him beware lest in going further he forgets the point on which he has already been seven times over assured and sealed and made manifest that he himself belongs to the kingdom of God. Do not lose your evidence of one point, in your investigation for which you are imperfectly equipped, at another. Having got hold of the jewel, keep it. We are not all equally convinced at the same points; what satisfies one man is not within the range of another man's thinking. The other man may therefore say with perfect satisfaction and good faith, I cannot understand all these critical points; I am not really qualified to be a judge of them; but, see here: Christ has proved Himself to be my Saviour, I propose meanwhile to rest there, and when the sky is more radiant I will tell you what I have seen of the vision of God; meanwhile I stand at the Cross a sinner saved. As one of thousands of Christian teachers, I am so anxious that people who are not qualified for the business should not meddle with things that are far above. I do not know that we can improve the evidence given by the man whose sight

was given to him by Christ; he said, "There are many things that I cannot understand, I do not profess to explain them; but you are not going to steal from me the fact that whereas once I was blind now I see. There may be another man somewhere else who has another argument which I cannot grapple with or pretend to understand, but I see." Sight is proof. If we could bring the Christian Church along that line we should have a great deal less talking, discussion, criticism, controversy, for which we have no sort or measure of qualification.

Now let us look at that idea. The subject is the stopping places in Christian evidences. What further need have we? why go on with the case? may it not be well settled at this point? Apply that inquiry to the whole range of Christian thought. Apply it to the Bible. What further need have we of any witnesses, whatever language they speak? Well, what has the Bible done for me? might be a fit question for every Christian believer to ask. What has the Bible done in the education, uplifting, refinement, and salvation of the world? It is not to be imagined that there are a dozen people in almost any congregation who could handle what might be called the critical evidence. They are not grammarians, they are not students of words in any deep or large sense; so they come to the book, not as a set of letters, but as one consolidated word—The Word of God. If it were "the words of God" they would be lost, for they have no skill in the colour and music, the harmony and emphasis of mere words; but coming to them in its completeness, its integrity, as "The Word of God," they are able, though unlearned in mere letters, to judge that Word and to say what effect it produces upon them. What is the effect of the Bible upon you? We never read it, is the answer, without being elevated, without feeling that there are more things in heaven and earth than I have ever dreamed of. The Book meets me where no other book can meet me; it is a night-and-day book, it shines in darkness, and it is a light above the brightness of the sun at midday. No other book gets such a hold on my imagination, my convictions, my conscience, my will. Then stop there, stop the case; it is enough for you:

why should you go about asking other people if this is all true when you know in your own soul that you have felt the uplifting and thrilling blessing? What do you think of this poor creature, who having touched the hem of Christ's garment, knew in herself that she was healed? What would you think of her going about and saying to her friends and neighbours, "Do you really think I am healed? how can I be healed? the Man gave nothing, I simply touched the hem of His garment; it does look a little incredible that I should be healed after so simple a process: what do you think? ought I to believe this? ought I to sit down in doubt, or ought I to go about and publish the Gospel to every creature I can reach?" That is it! If people have to go about asking other people how they are, the case is sad. And yet this is exactly what people do with Christianity. They say to one another, Do you think that I am a saved creature? do you feel that I am really on solid ground? Have nothing to do with these quaking, talking people; they would spoil heaven, they affront the lights, they shock the flowers. You need not ask any man whether you have been healed: you know it in yourself; unless the evidence is internal it never can be external. Therefore there is a stopping place in the evidence.

Where do I stop in the matter of the Bible now? "Well," one man says, "I will tell you where I stop; I have been adding up all the good institutions and all the holy agencies in my neighbourhood, and everything that uplifts man, encourages and inspires man, has been derived from the Bible." Stop the case there; that will do. What further need have we? if you know that, stand up for the Bible, vindicate the Bible by its resultant action. How do you feel about the Bible? Another man answers, "I will tell you what I feel about it: no book that ever came into our house gave it such living comfort, and we have seen distress, we have lost seven children, the grave has been dug under our very hearthstone; we have lost wealth and prosperity, things have gone sadly and overwhelmingly against us, and nothing we could lay hands on did us so much real good as the Book of God." Stop the case: what further need have we than this? why go about

multiplying witnesses? You know it in your own house; your graves are your estates; your felt comfort is your vindication of faith. And what do you say? "My answer," says a third man, "is that the Bible always makes me discontent with myself and always promises me a better self; the Bible will not let me rest until I have gone a step further in doing good. The Bible enlarges and never contracts my beneficent programme. If I say, 'I will feed seven of the poor starvelings,' the Bible says, 'And to eight give a portion.' If I say, 'I will visit three houses of fatherlessness and widowhood,' having completed the three the Bible always says, 'There is a case next door, further on, in which you can do real good.' The Bible therefore inspires me in beneficence, cheers me in sorrow, and lifts the whole social life of the neighbourhood to a higher level." What need have we of further witnesses? Are you going, through some question of grammar, to give up all this? or are you going to look facts in the face? Why, man, hear me in the name of the threefold Name: you never would have been the man you are but for the influence of the Bible on your life: what need have ye of further witnesses? Let us turn the high priest's question the other way, and if men will only be faithful to their own spiritual apprehension and appreciation of the Bible, and repay the Bible what it has already paid them, we shall terminate many a foolish controversy. I want Christians and Bible students to speak up for their Bible; do not make a secret letter of it, but say, "This is the Book that helped me; whether it can help you or not I say not, but this is the Book that made a man of me." More testimony, personal testimony, experiential testimony, and the case is established for ever.

Well, suppose it is, in the second place, the Gospel that is on its defence, where do you join the Gospel? One man says, "I really cared nothing about the Gospel as an energetic and reclamatory force until I saw what it did in our neighbourhood." What did it do in your neighbourhood? "It made a new neighbourhood of it; the wilderness blossomed as the rose, and the wayside is as a garden of God." Ah, how so? "The Gospel was preached in its simplicity, power, and holy unction, man after man, woman

after woman fell before its gracious power and accepted it." And what became of them? "Their very houses were cleaner, their children were more attended to, and all they had to do was sweeter, wholesomer, gladder, diviner." Well? and the man whom I am inquiring of answers, "I could not resist a Gospel that has done such wonderful things in my own neighbourhood." That will do; what further need have we of witnesses? stop the case there, declare what you have seen, yield to facts. You cannot answer many questions propounded to you in polysyllables, but you can say, "I live in a poor miserable neighbourhood; at least, so it once was; but the Gospel of Christ came there, by some poor missionary or some woman evangelist, and the Gospel has gotten such a hold upon these poor, rough, unkempt people, that now they are gentle, and are asking larger questions, and are wondering about the great possibilities of life; they are new creatures in Christ Jesus: I have no book evidences, I am not a book student; what men can say against this Gospel I do not know, but I know what can be said for it, and because it has made a new neighbourhood of the place I live in, I stop there, and night and day I lift up my heart and mine eyes to heaven, and bless the Christ of the Cross." Do you ever know the Gospel stop a man in enlarging, expanding, and ennobling his life? "Never; why, some of the poor folks in the neighbourhood I am speaking of and in which I live have begun to buy little things of beauty; their very houses have become a sort of churches; where there used to be nothing to attract the eye, there are now little cuttings—very small, but all these indicate a direction and a movement in an upward policy. Some of them have got only black-and-white cuttings, but even they make the house prettier. One working man, having learned something of the power of Christ, has got a few chromo-lithographs; he knows they are not grand pictures, that they were not sold in the Academy, he knows that, but he feels that they, poor as they may be, help the house, and help the eating and drinking of the house, and have a sort of kindly influence on the sleep of the night." Who can tell the mystic influence of music, colour, poetry? who can say where anything good really terminates?

Nothing good ever terminates; it goes right back to its source, God, the author of every daisy, the author of every sun. What further need have we of witnesses? None. Let every man rest on his own rock.

Well, what do you say about the effect of the Gospel upon heathen and barbarous countries? Marvellous, beyond all imagining. The Gospel has gone into a kind of hell, it has gone amongst people who have never heard of its existence, who have never heard of the Cross and the blood and the offer of redemption, and these men have been threatened, many of them have been murdered, and still the Gospel has gone on repeating its sweet, tender, redeeming story; and places that have been embruited and bedevilled, places that have been next door to hell, if not part of its very centre, have become civilised, evangelised, and now there are schools and homes and churches, and the altar of God is beloved and adored, and the Cross gathers up into its grim symbolism all that is holy, inspiring, and blessing in human life. What further need have we of witnesses? None; stop the case.

And may we not call for purely personal testimonies? What has the Gospel done for my character? What has it done for me? Let me hear an average commonplace man talk. The Gospel may find a man commonplace, but never leaves him there. There is no commonplace in the Gospel. It never leaves a man content with prose; the Gospel shows every man the poetry under the prose. Let this man talk to us: "What the Gospel has done for other people I am not prepared to say, but it has done everything for me; once I took great delight in wicked practices, now I take none; I could drink with the deepest drunkard and beat him at his own infernal game, I drink nothing now; it has given me a new house, I no longer speak of my 'house' because the Gospel has turned the house into a home, and I can speak of that without ever thinking of the mere rectangle, the mere bricks and mortar; oh, my house is now an enchanted palace, every window looks towards heaven, and all the birds seem to know my home, and many linger on the wing and sing or twitter some

little opening tune, and I am sure these little birds are sent from God. I lost my only child, and when I found the Gospel I received her back again in a new way, in a beautiful vision, in a seven-sealed assurance that I felt her hand in the dark; I hear her voice, it gets no older, it gets sweeter, and she is nearer to me than my hand is to my heart. All this the Gospel did for me, when the road was lonely and the lights all out; a voice spake to me in lonesome places, and I heard words too subtle for articulation saying to my heart, 'It is very dark here, very dark, but I know every inch of the road, and I will guide you past all the perils and difficulties;' and I felt the breathing as of a balmy breeze upon my withering cheek. All these things I know, I have tested and proved; and you ask me to give up the Gospel because some man somewhere has found some sort of document which fills him with difficulties and perplexities? That man has never been where I have been; I am not going to give up that night walk; that night walk was the beginning of mornings, that was the beginning of summers." What further need have we of any witnesses? Stop the case; stand there; keep to your own experience. Lay not up for yourselves treasures where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. If you have only a book faith, somebody may come and steal the book; then where is your faith? Rachel, cunning thief, like all the gang to which she belonged, stole her father's gods, and ran away, and sat on them. A god that can be sat on is a poor god; a religion that can be stolen is a poor religion. If your religion is a burden on your head it may be taken away, but if it is the life, the music, the hope of your heart, no thievish hand can thrust itself into the sanctuary and deprive you of your soul property.

Now shall I say that it is not necessary, as was assured at the beginning, that we should be strong at all points along the Christian line, but it is perfectly possible and absolutely essential indeed that we should be strong almost to almightiness at some point? Hold on to that point—at some point; it may not be my point, but it is your own, and unless a man's faith is his very own he may be deprived of

it some day, but unless it gets right into the blood and becomes part of the very palpitation of the heart, the very throb of the pulse, unless it gets into the inner blood and mingles with the corpuscles of that vital stream, you have no religion. My only fear is lest some of our young folks should take the opinion of certain people who know nothing about religion upon the value of religion. They never do so in other things, but they are told that there is a half-penny pamphlet published which will destroy all Christian faith, and they—borrow it! On the whole, I should advise you not to be going about seeking for destructives of your piety, but rather go to those who deal in confirmation, inspiration, encouragement, which means the infusion of strength. And you preachers might take a word here. In the pulpit we really have nothing to do with doubts, hesitations, and personal wonderings. When I go to hear my preacher I want a message from him—hot, direct, sympathetic, human, divine. Poor little preacher! shall I be saying, "Well, now, on the whole I sometimes think there are very great difficulties, and sometimes there comes over my head a sort of mist or cloud regarding Moses and Isaiah and Abraham, and I——" What is he mumbling about? He is no preacher, he was never meant to be a preacher; turn him out! What further need have we of any witnesses? With Fiji and New Guinea and the islands of the sea all before us, turned into a garden of the Lord to a very large extent—what need have we?

Now the other side never, never come to me and say, "If you will come down here I will show you what agnosticism has done for our neighbourhood." I never go.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us, until we escape the shadows and troubles of earth, and enter into the light and the rest of heaven. Amen.

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we worship Thee as the comforter of man. Thou art his creator and redeemer, yet Thou hast sent an offer to abide with the believing soul for ever. We would receive the Paraclete, we would receive the whole solace and comfort of Thy grace. We need it all. Thou hast sorely broken us; Thou hast taken us into places rocky, without well or fountain, without honey and without sunshine. Yet even in the night-time Thou hast a song for the souls that love Thee, Thou dost suddenly surprise us with Thy power and Thy tenderness. We would respond to all this redeeming and healing ministry by sacrificial obedience, by higher delight in Thy commands and Thy promises. Thou hast always given unto man some sign of Thy presence; there has been a seal between us. Thou hast given unto us Thy name, which we alone can read, because Thou hast given us the key and the interpretation thereof; in our hand is a seal, on our forehead a name, in our heart a tender spiritual sign. All this is the outcome of the Cross. Blessed Cross, tree of blood, tree of triumph! Amen.

CXXXIX.

ROD AND STAFF.

"*And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod.*"—NUM. xx. 8.
"*Then he (Elisha) said to Gehazi . . . take my staff.*"—2 KINGS iv. 29.
"*Thy rod and thy staff.*"—PSALM xxiii. 4.

E have always associated the word "rod" with chastisement. Herein we have deprived ourselves grievously of great comfort. Will the preachers collate the passages in which the word "rod" occurs? they will find material there for a never-ending course of lectures, full of sap and encouragement and profitable gladness. We read that the flock is to pass under the rod; so many preaching friends have told us that we have all to be chastised: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth," He makes red marks on their backs. That may be true, but it is not the whole truth. When the flock is to pass under the rod it is not to be smitten, but to be counted; there was a little gateway through which every member of the flock was to pass into the fold or into the green pasture, and, that the shepherd might know that every sheep was really where it was intended to be, he counted each as each passed through the narrow gate; then he knew that the whole flock was safely enfolded and was at ease and at rest in the pasture of God.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Take the rod." Even Moses was nothing without the sign; Moses, greatest, strongest of lion-hearts, was only a layman when he had no rod in his hands. God always gives a sign; there is always a Divine mark; whatever it may be, it is of God's choice, and only when we hold that mantle or rod or staff are we mighty with omnipotence. The rod was in a sense the Lord Himself; the mantle was a token of the Divine presence and inspiration. The rod is done

away, but the thing signified abides for ever. We must now have spiritual interpretations. The outward and the visible may have undergone modification, amounting almost to extinction, but the thing signified, the inward and spiritual grace, must be our anointing for ever, if we are to be men of power, carrying miracles about with us as if they were but commonplaces. Bread is no commonplace, though it is so commonly used as to have lost in many minds its great fame ; but bread is still the staff of life. When Moses is called upon to-day to do any great work, the Lord always says to him, Take My Word, take the Bible, take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of truth. So even we, the modern and latest descendants of Moses, have our rod, our sign of commission, our seal and pledge of being no laymen in the sense of not being initiated into the mystery of the heart of God. "Take My Word." What the ark of the covenant was to the Tabernacle in the wilderness, the Bible, the open Bible, is to the Christian sanctuary. You may be a father of a family or the head of a mercantile house, you may have no association with what may be termed the inner mysteries of the altar, but if you take with you into the market-place and into the family and into every place across the sea and through the jungle, the rod, Pharaoh must bow down before it and the devil get out of the way. Have you the Word of God? Is your religion a mere set of opinions? Is yours a changeable, variable religion, a coming-and-going piety? or is it founded on the Word, the rod, the staff, the prescribed sign of Divine companionship and power? Answer me, and be true to your reply. Without the Bible on what do we rest? Nothing, not even on the wind. Has the Bible its right place amongst us? When the Lord calls a man from sheepfold or orchard or harvestfield, He does not send him empty-handed to do His work, He says, Take the rod. Lord, what is the rod? The Book. What book? My Book; the Book of inspiration, the Book that holds in it the germs, the beginnings, of that great tree which is to overshadow the whole earth and form a cathedral of singing delight. When you went out to do good on this or that occasion what did you take with you? Did you take some poor

little human writing, and say, "How clever this is, how very admirably this is phrased; this is a very miracle of expression"? I do not wonder that you came home without aught of result; emptiness brought back emptiness. You were disappointed, but without reason; the disappointment was perfectly explicable; you went with your own notion, your own word, your own clever suggestion, you played a piece of necromancy, you did not open your lips and declare what had been put into your heart by the living God. Without the Bible there is no Church; with the Bible, properly interpreted, there is no failure. "Take My Spirit." The Bible is not a letter only; the Bible is so large in its implications, in its germ wealth, that it could fill all the shelves of all the libraries ever built by human craft. Some persons say that this or that man is a man of one book. When we ask them to explain the terms they say that he reads nothing but the Bible. The Bible is not one book, it is all books in the degree in which they are true, beautiful, beneficent. The Bible is to be interpreted spiritually. There are men who can read with spirit-eyes; they know the hidden meaning of the sacred Word. It would be strange if this were not so, considering that we find the same philosophy over the whole field of human action and education. It is no exception to the great rule, it is rather the confirmation of the great law, that there should be men who can read the Bible more deeply and spiritually than others can. It is so in nature, in art, in statesmanship, in civilisation generally; why should the sanctuary be an exception? Blessed are the pure in heart—why?—for they shall see God. Cannot genius see Him? No; only one vision can see the vision, and that seeing vision is the pure heart; not the gigantic intellect, but the pure heart. It is the dew-drop that catches the whole sun and throws him back in a smile.

"And Elisha said unto Gehazi, Take my staff." Could not the man walk without the staff? He could not; there is a sense in which the staff makes the man; there is another sense in which the staff tries the man, pulls his muscle to know if it is aught but gristle. Set a man with the Bible in front of him,

and you change his whole relation, you change and you test the man himself. Take away the Bible and leave him to the riot of his own fancy, and he might say many beautiful and graphic things; put before him the Bible which he is called upon to interpret, and he cannot interpret a word of it unless the Spirit be in him, the inner light, that throws its blaze of splendour upon the outward and visible sign. Gehazi took the staff, what became of his doing so? Nothing; he could wake no child from the dead. Why? Because he was a bad man. The good staff in the bad hand means failure the world over. It is so everywhere. The Bible is a failure in the hands of the bad soul; that accursed soul cannot preach, cannot pray, and can take no spiritual part in the praise of the house of God. Gehazi has the right man's staff, and the little dead child does not answer to it. Gehazi had the staff, but he had not the hand, the heart, the purpose of Elisha. So it is with the Bible. What a wearisome thing it must be to preach a book you do not believe; how it must deaden the soul, how it must make the whole man feel frost-bitten even in the hot July! It is the right book the preacher has, but it is not with the right heart he reads it; so his reading is poor reading, stumbling, hesitant, mistaken in emphasis, destitute of music. You will find the Bible to be the driest, weariest book to you, if you only read it as a letter. If you read it as a message you have received from God, and passed through all the processes of your own experience, and if you have come out of all that preparation with a soul desirous as with the desire of hunger and thirst to know the living God, you will say, "I found Thy Word, and did eat; Thy Word was honey to me and the honeycomb; we seemed to know one another—bless it!" How is it that we come back from church and Sunday-school and district-visiting with the Bible in our arms, and have left no blessing behind us? Because the Bible is not in our hearts; we did not find it, eat it, revel in it as hunger might revel in a feast. It is not the Bible that has lost its power, we have lost our relish; we have accounted the Bible to be but one of ten thousand other books, we have not discovered and appreciated its singularity, individuality, its own incommunicable

accent. So men are getting tired of the church, and are going out into the field, instead of going exactly in a reverse motion. Go to the field, and find in it the vestibule to the church, the altar, the Cross.

When the right staff is in the wrong hands we shall find that we are simply impoverishing as well as degrading the ordinances of the church. The ordinances can only be really appropriated by the right spirit, the holy temper, the sanctified desire. It must be a most wearisome thing for some men to sit for an hour in the church, and the fact is that it is wearisome to them because they are not in the church, it is a merely bodily presence, the soul is not building its nest in the altar of God. Why, if it were so all the hours would be but a few flying moments. Everything in every case and in every relation depends upon the spirit. An organ is useless in the hands of a man who does not know it. It must be a wearisome thing for him to open the organ and finger the black keys and the white keys. If he should sit there all day long the organ will have nothing to do with him; the organ has never been introduced to him, he has never been introduced to the organ; he knows nothing about it, it is no sacramental offering to him. So in all the relations of the sanctuary. Poetry can only be read by a poet. Cannot anybody read poetry? No; nobody can read poetry, I repeat, but the poet. Anybody could read a hymn? Certainly not; the hymn is doubled by some reading, impoverished by reading of another kind. Take thy staff, and take it into your hands, take it to the whole heart; put the soul into it, and then the reading of a hymn may be one of the best sermons or expositions you ever heard. Half-heartedness kills everything. Unless we are whole-hearted we do not get the best of life. The whole-hearted man drinks up all the nectar of the rose; his no passing sniff, his a banqueting of the highest senses presided over by the inspired imagination. Are we whole-hearted, absolutely undivided in love? Then every sermon will be good, every entering into the sanctuary will be the reaping of a harvest.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Take the rod";

"And Elisha said unto Gehazi, Take my staff"; and the greatest, sweetest of all the minstrels said, "Thy rod and Thy staff," I will take them both, they comfort me, and thus prove that they are the Divine rod and the Divine staff. Still you see the same idea penetrates the whole thought of this discourse—that we must have, so to say, something. There is so little to lean upon in transcendentally spiritual religion. There are people who need many helps, little and great. Do not call them superstitious, they are at a certain state or stage of growth and development; they must have something, be it the hymn-sheet or the psalm-book; they are not yet so lifted up and divinely transported as to have no need of the visible universe; they are not happy unless at night they can see at least a star or two. There are some souls more spiritually and highly educated who see the stars through the clouds, yea, the clouds themselves become as it were a kind of telescope through which they see the stars in whiter brightness and still grander majesty. Thus we help one another; thus, indeed, we complete one another. Blessed is that society in which the members believe that what has been denied to one has been given to another, and blessed the society whose members wait for each other to fill up and sphere off the whole meaning of the *koinonia*, the communion, the fellowship, which God inspires and blesses. "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." Find me some names for these comforting ministries and instruments. You will find the rod and the staff of God everywhere if you look for them with the right eyes and the pure intent. Everything in all nature is the rod or the staff, comforting human souls, and bringing God quite near. Sometimes we cannot see God Himself, but we can see the rod, and we know it to be His rod; we can see the staff, and we know it to be His staff. Rod and staff are written all over with a cipher which the inspired and sanctified heart alone can interpret and apply.

I would have in my very heart of hearts every word that God has spoken. I would not have the Bible lying outside me, I would have it within, a spiritual and indestructible treasure. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," till the letter melt

into vision and the vision palpitate into music. Do you know much of the Bible? are you really and truly a Bible scholar? That word "scholar" is often perverted as if it related only to alphabets, grammars, dictionaries, and some sort of critical apparatus. There is a Bible scholarship higher than all that; in that higher sense we may all be Bible scholars, knowing the flower by the very root, seeing the mustard tree in the mustard seed, interpreting the one, the first primrose into a whole spring and a spreading summer. Do you really and truly know the Bible? is it sweet to you? is it the book you long for? is it the book for which there is no other book worth reading? Give me a Bible-reading congregation, and you give me a working, beneficent, untiring church, doing good all the while, and after every act of goodness feeding again upon the strengthening honey of God.

Thy rod, and Thy staff, and Thy promise. We have exceeding great and precious promises at our command; God has placed them at our disposal. There is nothing that can occur in your experience personally, domestically, or otherwise, that is not provided for in the Bible. I guarantee, if time permitted, to find everything in principle, germ, and suggestion that life needs in the Bible. The promises—you do not know how sweet they are until you need them. They are delightful companions; they take up no room, they make no noise, they never fret or vex the soul by calling attention to their claims. They are never out of the way, yet never in it; they are like the atmosphere, they are like the summer weather; the light fills all space and leaves plenty of room for every little child to sit down in. The promises—sometimes there are special promises, there are promises that seem to be made for you and me in particular conditions and phases of experience—as death, sorrow, loss, hopelessness. There is nothing unprovided for in God's Book. "Thy rod and Thy staff"; I find them both in the experience of countless saints. Biography is a kind of illustrated Bible. Read the lives of the saints: these men did not live for themselves alone, they have made the very air balmy with their prayers. The experience of the

world should not go for nothing. I have had experiences you may not have had, and you have had rich experiences through which I have not passed; therefore we need one another. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him. . . And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up My jewels." Conversation should be a means of grace; conversation should be an exchange of experiences. If these experiences are simply and most faithfully and truly told, they help all who hear them. The exchange of experiences is a kind of minor preaching. The preacher standing on his elevation is bound to speak those great, general, universal, atmospheric truths that touch the life of the whole world, but in private, in conversation, in companionship by the wayside, we can say many things that cannot be said in the open public place. Find in the experience and conversation of the saints an expression of the rod and the staff of God.

"The Lord said unto Moses, Take the rod." O let Moses, in his modern representation, hear this word: the rod is provided, take it. "And Elisha said unto Gehazi, Take my staff." The bad man withered it into common wood. "Thy rod and Thy staff"—that is a singing voice; that is more than a speaking voice. I hear it, I am thrilled by it, it associates the Divine name with something that is visible and tangible. We all need the means of grace. If you think you can do without the rod and the staff of divine musing and companionship and sacramental communion with God, you will go down when you leave the Church of God. You cannot miss a single religious service without being the worse for it; you cannot attend a religious service in the right spirit and with the right motive without being the better for it. You may not have understood it, but you felt it, and you said, Lord, it is good to be here!

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, and peace abide with us; then shall we have the comfort of the rod and the staff of God. Amen.

[*Sunday Morning, May 19th, 1901.*]

Prayer.

OH that our hearts could speak all that is in them concerning Thy greatness, Thy tenderness, Thine ineffable love, Father of us all! then surely would we beat down the mean thunder, and our voice of praise would fill the whole space. We love Thee, we magnify Thee, we call upon Thee, and we do so in the name of Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour of us all. We bless Thee for a great Gospel, a Gospel blessed and everlasting, because Thou Thyself art everlasting and blessed. We worship Thee as the Fountain of all gladness, we come to Thee as to living water of which if a man drink he shall thirst no more. We have suffered burning thirst in these low valleys, we have been overborne by the enemy, we have disappointed ourselves, and we have grieved our Saviour: now what wait we for but for the penitential spirit and the uplooking eye of love and expectancy, that we may see Him who is enthroned above all. Thou hast been gracious to us with great grace; Thou hast not withheld from us anything that is good; Thou hast led us in dark and difficult places; in the rock Thou hast found honey, and in the wilderness Thou hast caused rivers to flow. We will magnify Thee for ever because of what we ourselves have seen; we were brought low, and Thou didst help us; we were in utterest loneliness, and behold, a voice spake to our hearts; we were perplexed and in great distress and sore straits, and behold, a delivering angel came to our aid. How can we be dumb? how can we restrain our praise? May Thy Church speak more loudly and sweetly than ever, because of the grace that is in Christ Jesus and the joy which rises out of that grace and floods the soul. Thou hast been with us in the week-time, Thou wilt be with us also on the Sabbath day, and in that Sabbath day we shall find seven days' delight, for it is the Lord's joy to put such gladness in our hearts. We would that this day might be bright and glorious with a light above the brightness of the sun; we want a glory that quenches the summer because of its superior splendour; we want a light within, a morning of the soul, a dawning of the heavens. Lift up our hearts, we pray Thee; then shall our lives go back again into daily obedience and daily sacrifice, and find obedience and sacrifice to be the true joy. Dost Thou not heal all hearts that are broken? Behold all our hearts

are sore, some with this trouble and some with that, and some with that great fear and apprehension; for to-morrow the surface of the earth may break, and we may be let down into great chasms. The child is ill, the son is a prodigal, the girl has wandered far away, the joy of home is quenched. In other cases Thou hast filled the house with glory and with peace at every point. Wilt Thou, we humbly pray at the Cross, in the name and power of the grace of Christ, come to each of us according to individual necessity. Let the Lord hear us, seeing that we are gathered around the Cross, and the arms of our love are around the heart of the Sufferer. Amen.

CXL.

CHRIST, A PERPLEXITY.

"*What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?*"—MATT. xxvii. 22.

HIS was Pilate's inquiry. It was in the midst of a great uproar and utter confusion. He had never seen such a Man before, he had never seen such a look or heard such a voice. He did not know what to do in the midst of this distracting confusion and complete perplexity. He was not malicious, he was not unkind; he was simply bewildered. There were people about him, however, who had made up their minds; they no sooner heard the question than they returned the answer. "They all say unto him, Let Him be crucified." Never did such hot anger burn in any human tone. The proposal was carried unanimously. There is a unanimity which is not of God. We may make too much of unanimity; when the unanimity is merely of numbers it has often to be suspected; we must inquire into the moral tone, feeling, and quality of this unanimity.

This has been the question of the world for many a century, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" I find Him everywhere; He is beating at the door of every nation, He is knocking

at the door of every heart. He says, "If any man, any nation, open the door I will come in." He is ready: is the heart ready, is the nation ready? He answers desire, He fulfills holy expectancy. Do not suppose there is nothing to be done on our part—that we have simply to wait in dumbness and indifference. We have in one sense to make a beginning, though all beginnings are in God. Are there not also sub-beginnings, minor initiations and approaches? Who can tell exactly who begins the mystery of love? In the case of God, we know that we love Him because He first loved us, but after that great blood-love, that great Calvary-love, there are many instances of approach, inquiry, confessed necessity, many instances of dumb desire, as if our very silence itself would be a superior prayer. The question before us now is this: What are we to do with Him who is called Christ Jesus, the Saviour, this marvellous Man who imitates no other man, who never asked a soul to pray for Him, who stood out in an occasionally austere independence of all the sighing and the praying of human kind? What are we to do with Him? It is a puzzle. He always was a bewilderment. In the days of His flesh His friends forsook Him and others said that He was mad; and still this same Jesus is the puzzle of the world, the perplexity of all knowledge, the defiance of all approach to mere familiarity;—far away as the sun, playing around our feet like the morning light.

Surely a great mystery, surely a wondrous question, What shall we do with Him that is called Christ? There are several things we can do with Him, and we must make up our mind sometime what shall be our position as to this saving, redeeming, atoning Christ. You can crucify Him; it is always open to the sinner to crucify the Lord afresh and put Him to open shame; He undergoes that agony every day, that shame is His portion in His own Church. It is in the Church we find the crucifixion; it is always in the Church that Jesus was crucified. These people who are shouting and instigating others to shout were all members of the Church. These are not infidels; these men hugged the Mosaic documents to their hearts and cried as

they so hugged the documents, Crucify Him! let Him be crucified! put Him to death! These are religious voices. It is the religious voice, in that sense, that has always been against Jesus and is against Him to-day. No infidel can hurt Him, but the meanest of those who find a place in His Church can wound Him to the heart. How so? By selfishness, by covetousness, by unholy ambition, by all manner of wicked practice in the marketplace and in the house; there are a thousand ways in which we can repeat the drama, the tragedy of Calvary. Understand, therefore, O ye members of the Church, who drink symbolic blood, that you can crucify your Lord and trample upon His dead body. You so mistake what is the real meaning of this Man, the Christ, who came to change our nature, our disposition, our habits, the inner springs of our manhood. He did not come to hand us some piece of paper to be received as an outward standard of orthodoxy. He does not care for us being orthodox and sound on metaphysical doctrines. He cares for us to be pure in our love and complete and undivided in our loyalty to His Cross. O it hurts me as poison could never hurt, as keenest blade could never hurt, to hear some people talk about Christianity, and being Christians because they go to this church or to that church, and because they go regularly, and because they are perfectly sound upon some abstract and metaphysical doctrine. It is possible to be all that, and to set the four pillars of our bed above the very reek of hell. "I shall never forgive him." It was a Christian man who said that or a Christian woman who is sound upon the Trinity. If any soul can say of any other soul, "I will never forgive him," that man knows nothing about the Gospel of Christ. Oh, if I could get you all to hear that! You do not hear it. If you could hear it in your souls, it is the very voice and message of Christ. "I shall be a long time in forgiving him." Who said so? A follower of Christ. How long was Christ in forgiving us, the worst, blackest, basest of us? How long? "Confidence is a plant of slow growth; I may be able to forgive him." I never heard that talk on Calvary, I never heard a whisper of that tone in Gethsemane. "And if ye forgive not men their sins ye cannot be

forgiven by your Father which is in heaven." That is orthodoxy. Write it with stars on the broad heavens, and write it on your hearts as the very Gospel of the blood of Christ.

We may therefore crucify the Saviour in many ways when we do not seem to be crucifying Him. That is the very subtlety of the devil's temptation. There would not seem to be any wickedness in not forgiving a man who had injured you very much and who had prayed for your pardon. If any soul has ever asked you to forgive him, that soul supplied you with the greatest opportunity of being a Christian that ever was supplied during your whole experience. To plead for mercy and not to receive it, the case being between two human hearts,—that would stab the Saviour with a sixth wound.

There is another thing you can do with Christ: you can admire Him. Many persons admire Him, and get their livelihood out of Him: paint His portrait, surround His head with haloes, give His mother a nimbus, and give Himself as a Babe an aureole; all that you can do, but that is nothing. I have great fear of those who have not passed beyond the point of admiration. Jesus Christ came not to be admired, but to be believed, received, served. He is all, or nothing, and less than nothing. There is an infinite difference between admiration and adoration. We only admire that which pleases us. Admiration may be a form or aspect of selfishness. What child did you think of adopting when you called at the Foundling yesterday? I overheard you; you said, "I think this little one will just suit us." Describe that little one. "Fair, O so fair,—a daffodil, a most sweet flower; there was a kind of mystic pity in her eyes, and her very heart seemed to be throbbing with a prayer too deep and spiritual for words. And such a smile!—oh, it was like the breaking-up of the night and the incoming of the dawn. We have fixed upon her." No thanks to you; you are mean. Have *you* fixed upon one? "Yes; we were also there at the same time, and we fixed upon one,—so poor-looking, she was called by a great scriptural name, Not-Sought-Out; nobody wanted her. People passed her with hard eyes. Ay,

she was so poor-looking, she was not winsome, but she was human. You do not know what heart she had." The other may have effloresced in mere beauty, but this poor one, without form or comeliness, having no beauty that you should desire her, no angel can tell exactly how deep her heart is, and what wealth of love she could have lavished upon you and your household. Mere admiration, therefore, goes for nothing in the case of Christ.

There is a third thing you can do: you can adore Jesus. Now you are coming to higher ground. You can fall down before Him, you can offer Him your gold and frankincense and myrrh, not of mere gold and material, but of real reverence and love and faith, so that He shall be fairest among ten thousand and altogether lovely; not in form, but in the poetry of His meaning, in the ideality of His desire.

There is a fourth thing you can do: you can serve Him. What is "to serve Him"? It is to suffer for Him. It is such galling work if it be not done with the inner heart in its very wholeness and integrity of emotion. There is nothing so tiresome as religious exercise if it be a mere bodily exercise, if it be something mechanical, artificial, conventional, that which must be done for appearance sake; then the yoke is very heavy and the whole service is most galling, and we go to it with slow feet because with reluctant hearts. All depends upon what you desire in this matter of service. If you want to do more you have done it; if you have sincerely said that you would do more if you could, God accepts the will for the deed; but He judges keenly, He distinguishes motives, He discerns the spirit; His is a sharp sword dividing between the joints and marrow. Do we serve Him? is His service a delight? if our lives were deprived of His service would they go down in music, in quality, in hope, in force? If you can say, Yes, then you are in very deed serving the Christ.

There are three things you cannot do with Christ. First, you cannot get rid of Him. Some men may think they have dismissed Him, but they have not. It is Christ's habit, as it always has been from

resurrection time, to appear unto some in "another form." Read the evangelical story of the resurrection and the appearances of Christ, and you will find that He came to some in this form and in that form, and to others He came in "another form"; but in some form or other He is always there: He is there in the pricking of the conscience, there in the quickening of old memories, there in reminiscences of those who suffered for us and who prayed for us and who are to-day waiting for us. You cannot get rid of Him: there is a ghost in your life, there is a fluttering in your heart; there are emotions that have no true explanation unless it be profoundly Christian and profoundly religious. It is Jesus who fluttered the curtain by the bedside; you did not know who it was; you told in the morning that something had happened. It is Jesus that punctures your skin, so to say, with darts and needles and barbs and pricks of many kinds. It was Jesus that prevented the bargain being sealed; it was Jesus that confused your mind and made you write your name backwards instead of forwards. It was Jesus that smote the prize when it was almost in your grip. He said it would do you harm if you got it, so He showed it to you, allowed you to admire it, and then with His rod He smote it and it crumbled away. It was Jesus that gave you that happy thought, that bright poem-dream, that marvellous inspiration about helping somebody in distress. It was Jesus who said, "You have lately not done what you ought to have done for that poor creature," and you felt the tears welling in your eyes, and you said, "I will go to-morrow," and Jesus said, Do it to-day. Jesus has no to-morrow in this matter of discipline and sacrificial love. You cannot get rid of Him. He will come up the creaking stair to find you in your chamber of affliction and death. He did not come into the world without intending to be beneficently busy in the world and all its affairs. You do not know what He is doing. A sculptor said to me the other day, "This art of sculpture is just a process of destroying and re-creating, re-creating and destroying, and then creating and building up, and falling into despair and advancing again and the rekindling of hope,—a very mystery

of action." That is how God is sculpturing the world into a living image of Himself. Now it looks so poor, then again it takes on a kind of meaning, by and by it falls as it were to pieces again, and the Divine Artist seems to have lost His hold of the clay; but He has not, and He is working, and still working and dreaming some higher manhood, until we all come to be in the image of His Son Christ Jesus. Do not judge the Divine Sculptor at intermediate points; give Him time, give Him His own time, and the Lord will turn the dust of the earth into an image of Himself.

Secondly, you cannot mistake Him for someone else. That is curious. The uniqueness of Christ is one of the greatest arguments in Christian apologetics. There is none to compare with Him. For a certain time we think we have found His match, and we have cried out upon the wind certain names, hoping that they would be carried over oceans and continents and would be established in the affections and confidence of the people. Never! There is only one great Name that is above every name. It is so in art, it is so in every department of life. For a certain time things seem to be equal; for a certain time you say that this speaker or that speaker seems to be quite equal to Cicero and Demosthenes or any modern instance. That is for a time, but in just one tone the man you are speaking about will betray his real quality and create the point of bifurcation, so that he shall go away on a lonely upland road, and shall stand at the pinnacle of the hill, and all men will allow that he is without rival. It is even so with Christ in the greatest degree. For a time other people write sweet maxims, apophthegms that have real beauty of shape, and you will say, Can Christ produce anything better than that? Yes, He can produce Himself. Other men cut apophthegms and hold them up for admiration; Jesus was Himself the Apophthegm, the one-sentence Gospel, the great living, redeeming Heart:—"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." Hear ye! did ever man speak like that Man?

Thirdly, you cannot change the terms of disciple-

ship. They are severe terms. He never admits anybody easily into His kingdom. What is the way into the kingdom? The Cross is the only way. What is the object of discipleship? The Cross is the object of discipleship. Can I not have some ornamental cross, some ivory crucifix, and place it on my breast and say, Behold my tribe and my Master? No, this must be a heart-born Christ, this must be a cross that throws its shadow, yet its light, over the whole life. "If any man would be My disciple, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me." Where? There is not a man who is to-day in the right spirit carrying the right cross but you will find a song in his heart and a dream in his glowing fancy. These terms of discipleship hinder the progress of the Christian cause. That remark may possibly be made, but it is an untrue remark. These terms of discipleship make every man who accepts them, they give him durance, gigantic, majestic strength. It is no easy work accepting this Christ. I hear of hundreds of people being converted all at once; I do not wish to deny the intelligence, I never saw it, but I hear of it from lips whose veracity is unchallengeable; I receive the good news with gratitude to God. But it is not so with everyone; there are people who cannot be saved in a crowd. It is a terrific hand-to-hand fight with the devil; a hundred furious, pitiless appetites are fastening their sharp teeth upon these hearts, and they may be good for a single moment, and they are borne back into the willing arms of the devil; then they may take another step forward, and another, and their process of conversion only ends with their last breath; it was a fight to the last. But what did Jesus say to them? He said, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved"—right away down to the last beat of the heart. Still the devil has hope, still he watches with eyes of flame, but there is a whisper—you heard it in your house, many of us heard it in our houses—"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." Do not be hard upon our fellow-creatures. It seems to be easy to some people to be good, they would seem to have had but small experience of evil. And

others have to live fighting lives; they are strained to the last point of endurance. We must not speak hardly of them. They will enter the kingdom of heaven with great struggling, but by the grace of Christ they will be there—what if foremost in the singing multitude?

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us until we see face to face the enthroned and crowned Christ. Amen.

[Sunday Morning, May 19th, 1901.]

Voluntary ... ... "Andante Pastorale" ... ... *H. Smart*

Anthem 32 ... ... "The Lord is my strength" ... ... *Monk*

The Lord's Prayer.—*Hawkins.*

Hymn 40 ... "Lift up to God the voice of praise."

1st Lesson. 1 Kings viii. 27-30.

Chant 10 ... ... "Te Deum Laudamus" ... ... *Hopkins*

2nd Lesson. Acts xvii. 22-28.

Anthem ... "Blessing, glory, wisdom and thanks" ... ... *Tours*

Blessing, glory, wisdom and thanks, praise and might, be unto our God for evermore. O praise the Lord of Heaven, praise Him in the height. O praise the name of the Lord. His Name is excellent, and His praise above heaven and earth. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting and world without end, and let all the people say, Amen.

Prayer.

Hymn 163 ... "The golden gates lift up their heads."

Sermon.

Offertory and Cornet Solo:

"Light in Darkness" ... ... *Cowen*

Mr. George Harlow.

Hymn 42 ... "My God, I thank Thee, Who hast made."

Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod.*

Voluntary ... ... "Postlude" ... ... *Forbes*

[*Whit Sunday Morning, May 26th*, 1901.]

Prayer.

WHAT wait we for, Thou living God, but for the baptism of the Holy Ghost? We assemble on the day of Pentecost, repeated through many centuries, and pray that we may hear great voices from heaven and see great sights with the vision of our rejoicing hearts. We are weary of the valley, we sigh, we cry for the mountain-top; the night is long: would God that it were morning! Is not morning Thy great gift? didst Thou not send forth Thy sun as a strong man to run a race? and does he ever get further than the morning? It is always morning where Thou art; there is no noon, there is only morning. We love to think of morning and Jesus, morning and reunion, morning and high delight in God. We thank Thee for the morning star, we bless Thee for the dawning day; in our souls may we know what the morning means, yea, may the knowledge thereof attemper our whole feeling, and give us rest and peace and confidence and hope. We thank Thee for all occasions that bring us together in larger and tenderer unity; let these be days when the whole family shall come back again, though the memory stretch over many a grave and many a mournful year. Why may they not all come back this morning and make the morning glad?—no more in the flesh, but in the more vivid and effective spirit, in tender reminiscence, in tearful delight, so that our whole remembrance shall be lighted up as with a light above the brightness of the sun. Wilt Thou not allow them all to come back for a moment to the earth, though it is small and dreary and doomed to fire? Might they not inspire us in our work, cheer us in our depression, and revive us when the soul is sorely fallen? Let all the little children we have lost come back, and all the elder folks, and all the sweetest companions, and all the people who nourished and cherished and loved us when we could take no care of ourselves. Thou canst bring all things to our remembrance, Thou canst lighten every eye and make vivid every feature of the face, and Thou canst enable us, furthermore, to recall the holy communion and to see one another as it were in the Lord's face. We have lost the Holy Ghost, we are now only ordinary manner of men; no one man is distinguished from another, there is no towering light, no blazing glory. We have gone after commerce and mammon and dust and all manner of

sordidness, and the crown of cloven fire Thy Church hath lost. God pity the traitors who have endangered, so far as they could, His sovereignty and His throne amongst men! May we pray for the Holy Spirit. Shall we prevail if we make that great prayer at the foot of the Cross and in sight of the blood of atonement? Lord, spurn not our cry. Would God it were morning! Amen.

CXLI.

THE DESIRED MORNING.

"*Would God it were morning!*"—DEUT. xxviii. 67.

HIS cry is going up from all the earth in all languages, and sometimes unconsciously. The heart is one, the passion, the vehemence of life is expressive of a common humanity. Sometimes we do not know that we are praying. The atheist prays, and cannot help it. Others, again, pray consciously, with vehement movement of soul towards heaven, wanting something new, something bright, something inspiring. It is not necessary that we should know the whole meaning of our prayers, it is not necessary that we should know the whole meaning of anything we do. There are the limitations; who fixed them? who made it impious to go beyond them? No man can answer these sharp questions. The little child does not know the meaning of its own baptism; neither do I; neither does any man. Baptism is not an action to be explained; it is not confined to water; it is a baptism of power and fire and influence and enthusiasm. No man knows fully what he is doing when he takes the cup of red wine at the Lord's table. He has a little letter-notion about it; that will suffice in the meantime; the full mystery, the entire and total meaning, are not for these grey skies. There is time enough after time is dead.

In the first instance, all this refers to a great matter of punishment which the Lord was about to inflict

upon His disobedient people. He would not leave them alone, night or day, He would make them feel the thong for every sin they had committed; for every evil word and every evil deed there should be a lash as of a scorpion sting. They should so suffer for their disobedience that day and night they would say, "Would God it were morning!" and at the morning hour they would say, "Would God it were evening!" Things go hardly with the bad man. The coward dare not confess the whole punishment. But God does not spare the evildoer. So the cry may be one of restlessness, weariness, impatience, that dreadful consciousness of monotony which the soul cannot bear beyond a certain point. There is nothing so monotonous as a blazing sun. We love the king-light for a few moments, we love the noon sovereignty for countable minutes; but there is nothing more terrible than the monotonousness of an unclouded sun. Oh the terrible punishment of having no clouds, no defining lines, nothing but dazzling, scorching whiteness! The poet takes his mantle and enjoys his licence when he sings of "sacred, high, eternal noon." But we want none of it. We understand the poet, he means morning at its best, morning in its newness, cheeriness, vernal quickening power. "Would God it were morning!" It is a great cry, the interpretation of the soul's dumb desire. The soul is weary, it is confused, confounded, perplexed, mocked, and the darkness itself becomes a whip wherewith the hand almighty scourges and chastises the soul.

The text may be regarded as an aspiration, a hopeful and vehement desire. In that higher spiritual sense let us think of it a moment or two while yet the sun has not climbed to the zenith. Listen to the various tones. "Would God it were morning!" That is the aspiration of a puzzled student, a most perplexed and bewildered thinker. He is drooping towards atheism, down to the low dank levels of dejection if not despair. Why so? "Because," he replies, "things are so mysterious; nothing ends in itself; the tuft of smoke has gone back to some primal fire; and all things are so confused, intermingled, and so deeply and tragically engaged in internecine conflict; and there is so much apparently needless

suffering on this small globe. Methinks''—the student continues, interrupting his own aspiration for a moment —" methinks the whole little place called the earth, the globe, is but a pebble and less than a pebble in the hand that made it; it will soon become one solemn killing groan.'' Then the student still continues, " The suffering I could partially understand if it were deserved; if I were to collect all the gaols of the world into one great prison and could look into all the villainy which is incarcerated within these shadowed walls, I could understand in some degree why men were suffering, but I am thinking of the little children that can only look their desires, for they have not attained the age of spoken prayer; I am thinking of the fair white bosom that is but the hiding-place of a terrific agony, undeserved and unexplained. In some sense I could understand all the larger parts of the cemetery, the high mounds and the elaborate epitaphs, but when I pass through a grassy hedge and go into the children's ground, and not a child at play, I say, 'Would God it were morning!' that there were some light upon this mystery of suffering and premature death. I pray for morning, meaning by morning, light, and the liberty of light, and the hope of light: would God it were morning!'' I can understand that man; he is not talking mere plausibilities, far less is he talking platitudes; he is grappling with a great agony, and he cannot in any wise understand it; he does not see why it should be, partly because he begins at the wrong point. If he were to carry his case backward another ten thousand cycles, then he might see things better, in a larger relation at least, and he might begin out of his own personal perplexity to comfort other people. The grave is so big when there is nothing else to look at; so small, when looked at from the zenith of heaven. Would God He would permit me to go back ten thousand years at least—a mere momentary throb to Him in His infinite eternity; then I should see the real quantity and quiet of the things that are round about me, and that are pushing and chafing me. We cannot see things when they are all grouped together in one multitudinous uproar and struggle; but away yonder, up a hill, ten thousand miles above the sea level of time, we might see things as they are relatively, and it may be largely as they

are really. If you want to see anything, put it away from you, increase the distance between the object and the observer, set whatever you are looking at in a right relation to all other things; and then what music you create, and what explanation, and what rest out of tumult. We have often said, "Would God it were morning on these mysteries! nothing seems to go aright, everything seems to be jostling with everything else; there must be some black evil spirit interfering with the smoothness of the Divine movement; there must be a prince of the power of the air, there must be a power we cannot define and cannot estimate, that is changing the relations of things, creating anger, causing distress, confusing and blackening the outlook of the imagination. O what is it? Would God it were morning!" and then we would see the devil but for the fact that he could not bear the light and always dies before it reaches him.

This cry, "Would God it were morning!" is occasioned by Sorrow, written with a large capital, as if it were personalised, turned into an eloquent but grim personality and figure. Yet how poor the world would be if all the books that Sorrow has written were taken out of it! What if sorrow be but the broken clouds of a very sunny day, helping us to see better into the depths of the sky and to feel more sensitively the meaning of interpreting light? Now that you think of it, perhaps you will set your life back forty years, and begin to say what sorrow has done for your life and for your house. Let us begin with the library. What books are those you bought in the darkness of your grief? You meant them to be candles, lamps or flashes of light, that you might at least see something of the awfulness of the abyss if they could show you nothing of the infinite blue where all the mornings are and all the summers. Sorrow has refined you, sorrow has introduced a new tone into your voice; sorrow has given you a better estimate of other men, and their sins and wants and whole position in life; sorrow has taught you how really, not formally, to pray. Why, now you can pray; people who listen to you know that you are praying; and you are enlarging your prayer so as to take in other cases,

other circumstances and fortunes, so that you now stop where you never stopped before, and now you give a lift to some who have fallen by the way. Some morning will fall upon all that suffering, and the morning will be jewelled with dew, and will be full of singing birds ; and you will want that morning exactly at that stage to wait, to stand; for it is the morning of heaven.

This cry for the true morning is the expression of struggling but hopeful faith. The soul can never give up that idea of the morning. Sometimes its grasp seems to be relaxed, but God will take care that the hope and promise, the sweet confidence of morning, shall not be taken out of the hand. They say in poetry, and we have proved it in fact, that "hope springs eternal in the human breast"; the meaning of all that is the presence, the purpose of divine and holy sovereignty. The soul says to itself, If morning would but come! I feel that my wings are as strong sa they ever were, and I have not forgotten the way that lies upward, over green meads and through flowery and fragrant places. Sometimes we seem to have received so much of mystery and sorrow that there can be no further possible hope for us, but the years have been turned into jewels, the blindness has become a new medium of sight, and the soul has opened its attention to voices and presences hitherto not fully recognised or felt in all their sweet power. Sometimes we can feel ourselves growing in wisdom ; sometimes we are quite sure that we have made an advance upon yesterday. Now and again the old tone of confidence comes into the voice so long choked by tears and sobs, and takes part in some dropped hymn and makes it live again with the newness of its own life. These are mysteries, these are hopes and comforts ; these constitute the morning we have been sighing for.

This cry for the morning has been sustained by saintly histories. The diaries of the higher biography are full of attestation as to the answered prayer, the returning light, the rising dawn. Men have felt these things and have received them into a holy and sensitive experience. Some people have no souls ; they have

no biography, they have nothing to write; they were busy here and there, and the king passed by. Oh the sadness of it, the mockery and the madness and the devil-triumph! Why do we not keep a record in some sense of ourselves? It might be quite a secret record, but it would comfort us sometimes to look into an old memorandum of the soul. Is it always to be the fool's laugh, the unwritten merriment, the worthless foam of a night's so-called enjoyment but really called death? Is there to be no record? The Church is rich in records that help us all to-day. There is no study so entertaining and so entrancing and instructive as the study of well-measured and well-expressed biography. But to keep a biography in the secret desk—that will do; there, in that biography, written for your own eyes, let the soul go; find a place for the dropping of every tear, and talk yourself out with the frankness of self-attested sincerity and reality of soul. Taking up these old yellow leaves some day, you will see God.

The answer to this aspiration is justified by saintly experience. Men have been delivered; souls have been saved; as a matter of fact, light has really and fully come, so that men have stood up when all other men seemed to be sitting down, and they have towered up to a great representative personality, and have said, "This poor man cried unto the Lord, and the Lord answered him." I have seen the Lord, he continues in his bold but tender testimony, He has delivered me out of six troubles; the seventh is hastening on, and I will welcome it, and my welcome is a defiance, for it is the Lord that doeth all these things, and not man. Saintly experience has become an argument. At first we regarded it as an emotion. Men who have no souls, but just some kind of ticking pendulum within their bones which they call souls, have called all the saintly experience of the world emotion, hysterics, excitement, rhapsody. Oh, stuff their mouths with their own fine words and choke them with their own epithets! Believe me, there is a solid, well-tested experience of a saintly kind. You have to undermine the character of the witnesses before you can assail their testimony. Let God help us by His grace to increase

this witness, for one day it will be piled so high as to be a critical argument, an elaborate defence and exposition of Providence.

The morning has come to many; it may come to all. It has come to the grave. One bold sentence in the holy Book is, "He hath abolished death!" —expunged it, rubbed it out of the world's language; there is no such word in any gruesome meaning now. The resurrection of Christ was the morning that came upon the death-land. When Christ rose from the dead the morning shot forth its glory upon every cemetery on mountain top or in the bed of the valley. Death is a conquered foe, his sting has been extracted; and as for the victory of the grave, it is but a hollow shout, it has lost what it had of terrific threat and thunder. Recall the picture of the Lord's empty tomb; that empty tomb was the abolition of death. There is no death; death has been throttled, killed, stamped on, mocked, and driven into shadows where morning can never reach them. I believe in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; I believe therefore in the resurrection of the dead. I feel that even the deepest, darkest grave is only awaiting a key that can unlock it, and set the momentarily imprisoned tenant free. These are the great Christian hopes. Of course we expose ourselves to the laughter of men who have no other argument but mockery, and who can bear witness to no joyful sources except their own sneer and badinage. Those who stand upon the Rock of Faith, upon the tomb of Christ emptied and angel-filled, are confident that the morning has come in some places and is coming in all places. Oh to be on the mountain top and to have the first kiss of the morning! That would be heritage and crown enough. But if it must be so I am content to lie down in the lowliest valley and to get my morning kiss when the Lord will.

Benediction.

Grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us, through the night until the morning, until we join the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. Amen.

[*Whit-Monday Morning, May 27th,* 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we come to Thee in the name which unites us all, the great, sweet, eternal name of Jesus. Without Jesus there is no Christian prayer; we begin with His name, and with His name we conclude our supplication. We are gathered together as men and women interested in the progress of the kingdom of God upon the earth. This is our supreme desire. We would that all men everywhere should know Jesus Christ Thy Son as we know Him in our own hearts. He is made unto us the wisdom, the righteousness, and the grace of God; He is the centre of all things; by Him all things consist; He is everywhere. We would that all men knew this. We see His beauty, we shall go to Him with affectionate and adoring reverence; we will give Him our love, we will work in His service, work until the time of the lengthening of the shadows, after which there cometh rest. Thy servants are here from many churches, representing many interests, comforting us with their prayers, and comforting one another with mutual encouragement; and this is the day of Pentecost, the great Whittide of the Church, when the Holy Ghost was poured out upon the gathered disciples. May He now be poured upon us, so that we shall no longer be our mere selves, but other and greater selves, with noble ideas, with holy ambitions, and with purposes which can be formed nowhere but at the foot of the Cross. Prosper Thou our work; visit the city of our habitation. Judge us not in Thine anger when it is hot; remember our littlenesses, our infirmities, and our imperfections, and let Thine eyes be eyes of tears when Thou dost look upon our shortcomings. This we say in the name of Jesus, the name to sinners dear. Amen.

CXLII.

THE CITY DIVINELY VISITED.

"*The Lord came down to see the city.*"—GENESIS xi. 5.

ET us take these words in their largest and most modern application. Let us for the moment limit "the city" to the city of London; let us charge our imagination with the picture that the Lord has come down to look upon us all, upon the whole metropolis, and to form some estimate of its character, its service, its quality, its devotion. The subject thus is bigger than any hour in time, so we must condense and limit our view, not, I hope, without some profitable suggestion and stimulus and encouragement

"The Lord came down to see the city." He has never cared much about cities; they are no building of His. It was not God that built the city. The text well says that "the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded." Nature hates all buildings. No building takes any root in the earth; it is a tolerated and permitted thing. Nature begins to take down the building before the roof is quite finished. Nor has God paid much attention to kings; they are none of His creating. If you look back, far back, farther back than your own little pedigree, you will find that God never invented a king—unless it might be to afflict and punish people. It is so. What He may have done in the course of His providence in the way of bringing kings into the line of His sovereignty and grace, history must tell us; but speaking of all these things originally, from the very first plasmic line, the city, the king, are mainly of man's building and making. Yet the Lord comes down to look at the city. Could the face of God express the meaning of a moral blush, how the cities must offend Him, and in some instances, yea, in many instances conspicuous and memorable, how

many cities must gratify the Divine Inspector! Those who are fond of figures and in putting them into from for us, a most valuable class of assistants, tell us that the city of London, meaning by the word city the entire metropolis, would, if it were put in one consecutive street, reach across the Atlantic, then across the Continent of America, then a thousand miles into the Pacific Ocean. That is the metropolis we live in. Yet some of us never see more than our own little beaten turnpike from the villa to the office. We do not grasp the metropolis as a whole; who could do so with any completeness and adequacy of view? Could any man realise the moral condition of the metropolis, and be at ease in his own heart? We have a wonderful way of breaking things up, so that they really mean little or nothing to us except in little spots and patches. Still the metropolis may be regarded as an integer, a great living, marvellous, growing, threatening, appalling unit. We are told by the same authorities that if all the public-houses in the metropolis were to be put in one row they would reach from here to Oxford, some sixty miles in length. Sixty miles of drunkery and waste and shame, and all the terribleness that can afflict human nature and human society! When the Lord comes down to see this city, this metropolis, He sees all these things, and sees them as we can never see them. As I have told you before from this pulpit, we sit in a garden and talk about a world; we sniff the daffodil and think the world is nothing but spring flowers. Oh that we could see the bigness and reality of things, and betake ourselves to the duties consequent upon a vision so ghastly and appalling!

We have done in the various branches of the Christian Church wonders for the East End; perhaps for a little while we may have done enough there. What if all the churches should turn their attention upon the West End? That is where the devil keeps his holiday on an expensive scale, with lavish luxury and deadly concealment. I want to tear the covering from the shameful tempter, and to mention him by name, and to expose him, so that even crime itself shall begin to feel the whole place too hot for criminal

residence. I am told, not by the statisticians, but by men who know the case thoroughly in and out, from beginning to end, that there are not a few persons in the West End who keep two domestic establishments. I am told that there lies along that line a rich and profitable traffic in hearts, lives, and souls. Yet we gather around our respective hymn-books and sing almost with mirthfulness, with a strange species of spiritual gladness, about the beauty of the earth and the wonderful things that are done in the moral world. Some of these people drink the blood of sacrament, and drink it early in the morning! It is a shame, it is a sin, not to be pardoned out of heaven. We have made religion a cloak, a defence; we have set it up to ward people off our premises, that we may enjoy the devil's luxuries without interruption. On the other hand, what a blessed and wonderful metropolis it is in the matter of Christian spirit, benevolence, and divers agencies of all remedial and saving kinds! If a man were to propound this proposition, The metropolis, the capital of England, is the worst city in the world, it would be difficult to dispute his contention. If a man were to say, The metropolis, the capital of England, is the best city in the world, he could adduce many proofs in support of his submission and contention. Nor must we think that all these remedial features are connected with any one church or section of the Church Catholic. We are at once churlish and unjust if we deny that other churches are taking a fair share in the moral and spiritual and educational progress of the city. I am not here, nor are you here as mere Congregationalists or sectarians, but as Christian patriots, as Christian workers, hailing with noble and unsuspecting salutation every man, be his banner what it may, if it bear the name of Jesus Christ. Many here know my ecclesiastical position, and therefore I mean that knowledge to increase the value of my testimony when I say that the Church of England by law established has done wonderful things in visitation, in the education and in the protection of poor people, lost souls, broken hearts, needy Englishmen. What should we gain by denying this great fact? We should belittle ourselves if we did so. We increase our own influence, to put it upon no higher ground,

when we acknowledge the happy remedial agencies instituted and carried on by all sections of the Christian Church. So far as our particular object is concerned, the Bishop of London himself might have been here; there is room enough, I observe, in the pulpit for any bishop; and he would have been welcome. He need not accept our ecclesiastical position, but he could accept our philanthropic, social, Christian position, as men who want to uplift the Cross, so that every eye may see that gleaming glory.

There are many unjust and irrational things said about the declension of church attendance in what we now call the City proper. The only man in London who really vexes and torments me is the dear old grandmotherly man who tells me that about fifty years ago he remembers how the top gallery used to be filled, and how the aisles used to be crowded in dear old Mr. Forgotten's time. What a wonderful thing it was then—meaning that I ought to be ashamed of myself if there is any standing room in the church, because he remembers what used to be. And he himself has left the City! He has made one vacant seat. Because other people have imitated his example, he says, "Ah, I remember the old days, when things used to be very different." Shall I address him in the proper language? I dare not, but it is such men that deplete churches and go out into the suburbs to sing hymns and psalms, and comment upon the days that used to be, when dear old George Clayton, or John Clayton, or some other Clayton was overcrowded in the very City itself. No man in the old days ever did so much in the City as is done to-day. I claim that, I challenge denial; and yet these dear old people have gone out into the suburbs to enjoy a nice little bit of garden, when they ought to come into the City and teach a class or help a pastor or make it easier work for a man who is overburdened. Have they any right to be called into court to bear testimony upon the case? They are disqualified, and I for one will not listen to their foolish evidence.

Speaking from my own point of view, I want to make a proposition, and I want you to carry it. You have missions, settlements, schools night and day in

the suburbs, especially in the second-class suburbs—perhaps I might go a degree deeper than that in my characterisation of the suburbs—but I am not aware that we as Congregationalists have any Mid-London mission. How people turn their backs upon the poor great City! We have missions and settlements here and there, let me repeat with grateful recognition, but London City has no mission or settlement that I am aware of. Speaking exclusively at this moment from a Congregational point of view, I want a Mid-London mission. You make your money in the City, and then leave it to anybody who is fool enough to stop in it, or leave it to the devil. All your balances are kept in the City, and you go away to inhale the fragrance of the well-kept garden. I do not object to your having the garden; no garden can be large enough and beautiful enough for me; but I do object to anything of the nature of neglect as regards the very area within which you make all your money. You have no garden that I know of in Lombard Street; at least, if there is a garden, it is hardly worth naming; but you make your money within half a mile of the Bank of England, and then go out of the City as soon as you have secured what you can get for that one day. No; go and enjoy your garden, and God multiply it by ten if so be His will, but leave something for those who are left behind. I never know how valuable a Bank Holiday is until I go into some of those rich streets, into those large places deserted for the time being, and when I see in cellars and in poor tenements people with wan faces, looking up to see if they can catch one glimpse of blue. Many of them have never seen the grass; they think they have, but they do not know the meaning of the word in the first chapter of the book of Genesis — "God made the grass," and the historian is not ashamed to associate the grass with the constellations when he reckons up the assets of the Lord. When I see poor folks in cellars hammering away at their trade, making what little they can out of continuous industry, I do feel that it is a blessed thing now and then to give such people an opportunity of seeing Hampstead Heath, or Clapham Common, or Hyde Park, or any of the other great open spaces in the neighbourhood of London. Now

I want for all such people the Mid-London mission, and I want the people connected with this place of worship to give the greatest amount of accommodation to such a Mission, should it be founded. And I should like to see one or two chapels, which have great difficulty in continuing their existence, turned into settlement stations or mission stations or centres of local influence. Now this Mid-London mission ought to have a very happy effect upon all the outlying missions. I cannot but feel that if we are strong at the heart, we shall feel that heart's strength at the extremities. All other settlements and missions ought to look to the Mid-London mission for impulse, encouragement, example, endorsement.

What would be its method of working? First of all, and from first to last of all, there should be a great Gospel testimony—call it preaching, if you like, call it instruction, call it visitation, but the one thing that must be first, midst, last, is the Gospel of redemption, salvation, hope. People in many cases are willing to listen; all hearts are broken. There may be in human life a time of laughter and giddy, foaming joy, but, taking human life in its totality, it is a broken-hearted life, it is full of trouble, its eyes are pools of tears. Therefore to the end of things there will always be many who need a word of comfort, of cheer, and of direction. I should have the Gospel so preached to these people that they could not misunderstand it. The preaching must be simple, clear, sympathetic, downright human, because supremely divine. Every man at the day of Pentecost, which this day really is in a certain broad sense, "heard in his own tongue"—that is the point—"the wonderful works of God." Not in some made tongue, not in some dictionary lingo, not in some twisted polysyllables, but in his *own* tongue, as if his own mother was speaking into his listening ear. You must translate the Bible into all tongues. What would be the use of our going with a most elaborate, polished, and exhaustive essay into some of these dark narrow streets I have been speaking about? Why, the people would think we were threatening them with something; they would think it was a perilous kind of magic, and a new way of

upsetting what little comfort the poor man has. But talk to him in his own tongue; never mind the grammar if you can get at the man. What some people will do for grammar! They must have it in grammar, they must have heaven bound in morocco; they are dainty, they are sensitive in their love of elegance. So far as my Mid-London Mission is concerned, away with them! I want every working man to be talked to in the language he knows, and every poor, trembling, quaking heart whispered to in a music that cannot be misunderstood.

Well, that is the first thing we must have, therefore, the Gospel, the simple Gospel, the adapted Gospel, the Gospel very clearly and lovingly delivered. Then we must have a great programme of social vigilance. What do you think I had for my morning lesson after reading a portion of the Epistle to the Philippians to myself? My eye caught upon a paragraph in the paper of to-day, a London paper, that a brute called a man was summoned because of the violent assault he had made upon his poor emaciated wife. She said he would not work, he would stand at the street-corners, and enjoy himself in his own way, when he could make as much as two pounds a week. She had to keep the beast by charing and washing and baby-minding, she said. Our leading politicians, whatever their name may be, parliamentary or municipal, are determined to tax industry. You cannot build a cottage without some finger being laid upon it as a source of profit to the State; you have to submit to have your income examined into, you have to produce your books; but are these men to produce no account of their own laziness? We allow them to enjoy "the liberty of the subject." I would let them do so within prison doors. They might enjoy as much liberty of the subject as they could get in there. You tax industry, and let laziness go scot free. Every honest worker has to tell the amount of his income, and has to pay after a certain amount fourteenpence in the pound upon it; but a man goes to the street-corner and smokes and drinks all day, and enjoys "the liberty of the subject"! There wants some amendment there. If I have to give an account of my industry I ought to insist that

the other man should give some account of his laziness. I have not a penny in the world I have not worked for by the good providence of God, and I have to tell how many pennies I have and to be taxed upon them; but another man goes to the street-corner, where there is generally a public-house, and there he may squander his time, to the neglect of wife and children and of all that is sacred in the word home, and nobody will put a hand upon his shoulder, and say, What is your account? what have you been doing? you are a citizen of a great commonwealth; we inquire of other people, and we are determined to inquire also of you. It is not fair that industry should be burdened and penalised, and the other sections of society should go scot free.

I should have a great vigilance department, and it should be very conspicuous, and every poor illtreated woman, and every cruelly treated child, should be able to say, This is the place where we can find help; by going in here we can be advised and directed and assisted in some degree. I would put a great scheme of unseen detectiveness around the whole line of the devil's area, and that which is spoken in secret by his black lips should be thundered from the house-top, that people may know at least what attempts are being made upon the integrity and purity of social life. I would shut up all the sources of debauchery and bloodless murder. We have come in our ignorance to think of blood as associated with murder; I am here to testify that murder and blood may be two totally different things. There is concealed murder, there is stealthy, all but imperceptible murder; there is cruelty that eats up all love, all holy ambition, all natural hope. I should shadow the publican, and make life hard for those who ruin the lives of others. I could not perhaps do all that I should like to do, but I could endeavour to make life hard for the men who publicly and to a large extent unrestrainedly sell poison. I came to this church to-day through Regent's Park; I was wonderstruck at the magnificent horses that passed in imposing procession before my eyes. The finest of the horses were the brewers'. Note that fact; it has great meaning. The strongest, stalwartest of these great stallions were dragging beer barrels

behind them. You must not say these things, or you may empty your church. "We cannot," said one man to me, "have a Band of Hope at our place because the superintendent of the school is a brewer." Ought these things to pass without criticism? They ought not; at all events, I will endeavour to make my voice heard in all such directions. We have no wish to interfere with the liberty of the subject, but when the subject is killing his other fellow subjects I think we ought to lay an arresting hand upon him. We have a Salvation Army, for which we thank God, doing a great work directly evangelistic and directly social; I have every confidence in the purpose and motive of our Salvationist brethren. I want something less imposing in addition to that Army. You know that in our civilisation it is not altogether a question of army; we have what they call a police, and I want a grand local spiritual constabulary. There ought to be a moral constable as well as a municipal constable, or policeman, and every one of us ought to be enrolled in that constabulary; we ought to have courage and strength enough to uplift our voices when anything wrong, cruel, wicked is being done. We have courage in other things. Why, even I myself have a little courage in one direction, only a very little, and I exercise it when nobody is looking. I have stopped a man when I have seen him put an apostrophe on a gatepost where it ought not to be. When he has the word Elms or Limes or Oaks to paint he puts in an apostrophe before the last s. I say, "Now that is wrong." "Well, sir," said one man, "some says it is right, and some says it is wrong." "Well," I said, "I am the last man you have heard speak to-day up to this moment, and I say it is wrong." "Then," he says, "I will put it out." I went into a shop the other day where they spelled "Ladies'," where it ought to have been in the possessive case, plural, with the apostrophe before the s—"Ladie's." I said, If you keep that apostrophe there you will ruin my satisfaction with this neighbourhood; I cannot pass that shop without seeing that apostrophe. What I want us all to do is to have the same feeling about misplaced moral actions. I want the same little courage to enable me to say to a man who is going into a public-house, "Don't go in there!" I want courage to say to a woman who has her baby

in her arms and is going into a drunkery, "May I take the liberty of advising you not to go in there?" Now multiply that small instance by the great opportunities that lie at hand, and then see how much good may be done outside the technical pulpit.

Will you assist in founding this Mid-London Mission, a great Congregational endeavour to help the City in its best life? Hear me. If I were to walk from the front door of this church to the end of Lombard Street I ought to be able without going to the right hand or to the left to collect all the money needed by such a mission in as short a time as it would take me to traverse that distance. Many of the merchants are ready; they only want the suggestion kindly and clearly made to them. I want some minor Carnegie. Is there not a Congregationalist Carnegie? I do not mean in the double-million sense, but in the sense of having an abundance of resources and a sincere desire to know how to dispose of them in the interests of man and to the glory of God. Do not, however, suppose that we expect only the Carnegies of Congregationalism to help us in this Mid-London Mission or in any department of the work of the Congregational Union of London. We want the bronze as well as the gold; we want everybody to help.

Now this great London Congregational Union is the one object we have before us in our offertory to-day. It is doing an immense but almost concealed work. If I had any charge to bring against it, it would be almost charging the Union with a want of demonstrativeness and publicity, and courageous assertion on behalf of certain principles and the embracing of certain opportunities. I do not know any Union better worked. We have with us the Chairman of the Union and the Secretary of the Union this day, and in their hearing I am prepared to say that I do not see what more they can do than they are doing at present, unless they have an immense increase of pecuniary resources. This Union exists to help struggling churches, to enable men to do their work who are toiling under great discouragements. This Union looks out for building sites on which to erect halls, schools, or churches, as the case may be. This Union is a

kind of upgathering and consolidation of London Congregationalism, and it is worked with vigorous and happy effect. There is not a little sick-nursing in connection with this Union, not a little practical benevolence in ministering to the wants of the poor in the poorest districts. There is also a convalescent home at Folkestone, where certain classes of poor Christian people may be assisted in their return to health; there they have a kind of larger home. I should be doing injustice to my own feelings if I did not say that this particular branch of the work owes nearly everything to the wife of our Secretary, Mrs. Mearns, who devotes herself with great energy and solicitous affection to this department of service.

What are you doing? Many of you are doing nearly all you can; we thank God for your sympathy and your assistance; without you we should have no hope so far as man is concerned, but there must be scores in this great audience who perhaps have not had an opportunity of knowing what they ought to do in this particular direction. We have the opportunity this morning. This is my first endeavour to make use of Whit Monday for the purpose of holding a religious service. When I came down I thought nobody was coming my way. I said, If all these people were going the other way, to the City Temple, I think the place might be half-full at least. But you are here, and you are only here because your hearts are here. And I want this first collection to be so good that I may be tempted, God willing, next year to repeat the effort. The offering of love will now be taken in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us in the doing of all our work. Amen.

[*Thursday Morning, May 30th*, 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we thank Thee for all Thy great words, so full of light, so full of music. We feel that Thou hast given unto us great and precious promises. We cannot allow these promises to sink into dead letters ; we must by daily increase of faith turn them into the wealth of the soul. Thou knowest how soon our poor hearts would misgive themselves and how soon they would be afraid of the shadows ; so Thou hast sent unto us great gospels of promise, and we receive them with living hearts through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who is the great fulfilled Promise, the Yea and the Amen of the covenant of God. We thank Thee that Thou hast always held before us some higher light, some more beauteous colour, some great height that can be scaled by Thine enabling power. Thou dost not leave us in the valley, Thou dost beckon us away from the grave, Thou dost tell us of the fairer uplands far off, but still attainable, and by the inspiration of these exceeding great and precious promises we go forward from day to day, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken the promise, and none can destroy the oath divine. We come to Thee with daily burdens, with daily sin confessed and wept over, and we are sure, because we are at the Cross of Christ, that our sins shall be taken away, and Thy light shall be our glory and Thy smile our heaven. Amen.

CXLIII.

THE "NO MORES" OF LIFE.

No more violence.
No more wasting nor destruction.
No more sun.
No more moon.
No more mourning.—ISAIAH lx.

SHALL we meditate upon the "no mores" of life, things that are cut off and done away with, many of which need hardly have been here at all? They were here only for a little time, they brought their "no more" in their very hearts. All things that came were doomed before they began. The things that are seen are time things, mere figures on a dial, mere images in a pool, mere nothings.

The tone is very wonderful. No more sun, no more moon, no more wasting, no more violence, no more earth, no more firmament heaven, but quite another heaven, which that great firmament has been trying, and trying in vain, to hint at all these countless thousands of ages. It is very curious to notice how many things you can part with without parting with yourself. It is astonishing how many things you could cut off your own self and leave yourself in all its superior faculties and capacities. You could cut off your hands and arms and feet and lower limbs; you could take away your eyes and your ears, that is to say your sight and your hearing, and still be present and still be countable units in the sum total of the population. How much we could drop without dropping anything! Where is the *man?* That is the question, and as big a question in its own way as, Where is God? Where is the man in that measurable framework which you call yourself? We cannot tell; in its own degree man is as great a mystery as God.

Now it is proposed, and given to us as a promise to be kept in the heart, that there shall be no more sun, no more moon, no more stars and planets and other fiery points. How foolish therefore we have been to have regarded all these things as of any importance beyond a very limited line! Yet how mightily we have been taken up with these things, and how forgetful we have been of prayer! Is it not like man, is it not a map of himself drawn by his own hand, that he should be so busy looking at things that were doomed before they ever came into existence? What a wonderful study is man; how marvellously he magnifies and idolises the things which have little or no value! Only keep him counting, minting coins and setting them on edge, and he feels that he is living in prosperous times. Not he; that is to say, not necessarily; he may be counting his poverty as his wealth. We should be careful not to magnify and not to idolise the mere framework and scaffolding. Some people are all scaffolding; some people are all anatomy; some hearts are all framework—falsely named hearts where they ought to be named muscle and rubber and rubbish. Poor man,

kindly, gracious, foolish, groping man! he has got himself what he calls a telescope, and he has never been quite the same man since. He is looking at things upon every one of which is written Doomed, For a moment, For a little while. What are these but the upper glowworms? He calls all this roving through infinite space science. He has never thought to interrogate himself; he has accepted certain words as made for him, manufactured as it were at his request but without his cost, and he has not gone into the subject at all. Brethren, friends, men, there is nothing worth looking at but the Thing which these things are trying to represent. Our light affliction is but for a moment, while we look not at the things which are seen—time toys—but at the things which are not seen, and not seeable; for the things which are seen are creatures of time, they are temporal, they belong to the time region and the time area, but the things which are not seen cannot waste, they are under the special and ever-creating and ever-renewing power of God. How much it is to be wished that we should more clearly discern between the temporary and the eternal! That is what is meant by religion. Why do people make such a great mystery of it? There are souls, so-called, that are sufficed by things seen; there are other souls that live on God through Christ the Lamb. The one section may be described as the world, the other as the Church whose higher sky is not yet visible and may never be visible, and whose greener earth spreads its meads and its vernal valleys in the heart.

What is the eternal in relation to this particular text and context? The words are beautiful: "Thy God thy glory"; that is to say, thy God thy sun, thy God thy moon, thy God thy morning. Find all things in God, all you want, all you need, all that can be dreamed by sanctified fancy. I saw no temple in that upper city, said the seer in his Sabbath vision. And why did he see no temple in that upper city? Because the city was all temple. People forget that. They say that institutionalism will be done away; I would rather say that institutionalism will be purified, ennobled, sanctified; for God has been aiming at something even through the blunders of religion and civilisa-

tion. He has not always disdained non-religious religion. Sometimes He has accepted in some degree or sense even irreligious religion, which is the worst sort of religion imaginable. It is parent of all the imprecatory psalms. The psalmist wanted to be more religious than God; he said, Consume these people, dash them against the flint walls, crush them beneath Thy feet. No, saith the living Lord, that is not the way, it is by a nobler discipline that men shall be brought into the eternal kingdom. The things therefore that are round about us in the way of scaffolding and framework, sun-lamps and moon-lamps and all the apparatus of nature, all these things point to something; they are not the end, they are the indication, they are the indices, they are not the book, not the interior spiritual literature,—useful so far as they go, apparently indispensable. God says He will shake them all out of His lap, and they shall fall into the infinite void. What have they been doing? They have been doing nothing unless we have been accepting them in the right sense, they have been doing much if we have been accepting them in their upper poetry and significance. But all things are going forward by going backward. That is the paradox that puzzles so many people. What are they going back to? God. Where will they land? In the first chapter of Genesis and the first verse: "In the beginning God——" Who said so? The apostle Paul, the greatest interpreter of Christ that has ever appeared amongst men, he said in one of his great raptures, "Then cometh the end, when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to His Father, and God shall be all in all"; the anthem ends on its own first note. By going to the west we may go to the east. God has measured things in circles. There are no straight lines; those things that appear to be straight lines only appear to be straight lines because they are so short, but if we had the right eyes we would see that a straight line can never be drawn upon the periphery or the circumference of a globe. So all things are moving forward even when they seem to be moving backward, and things are often moving backward when they seem to be moving forward. We did not start the action, and we cannot control it. When one poor wondering man said, How

can this thing be? how can a little one become a thousand, how can a small one become a strong nation? the great religious triumphant answer was, "I the Lord will hasten it in His time." So He orders out of His way all mean interruptions and all the temporary substitutes for Himself.

Then think, looking at the text and the context, what a wonderful process, taking the Bible as a whole, there is going on under what may be called the category of the "no mores" of life. "No more sun, no more moon, no more sea, no more light, no more death, neither shall there be any more pain"—thus you can look at God cutting away the universe until He gets at its soul, meaning, personality, outliving matter and surviving it by countless ages of ages. Blessed is the thought that there shall be no more death. The old gruesome tyrant shall drop his sceptre and seek a hiding-place for himself. Poor smitten heart of man or woman or little child, think of this, that one day there shall be no more parting; we part to meet; in that other world we shall never meet to part. And how much solemn yet pathetic content is in that word when properly spoken—"No more." There is no tone of violence in that promise, it shall simply be superseded, abolished, done away with, turned into a bubble that shall be blown and lost on the contemptuous wind. These things are not thought worthy of a funeral. God makes no festival stir over them—for even grief may have a special kind of festival. God makes no event of these cessations. He says, "There shall be no more sun," and the sun veils his face and dies. And the fair woman moon, that sweetest face in all the nightly heavens, says, "My career is ended. There shall be no more moon," and the fair thing withers, and heaves no sigh and breathes no murmur; she has done well all these nights in that great sky, she has done her little best, she has been a little mimic day of the heavens, and men have praised her to her face till she has blushed again; but now there shall be no more moon. What has the sun been endeavouring to do all these ages upon ages? He has been trying to do what he never could do, but he has done his best to do his nothing. The sun has been struggling

to express God. I have sometimes endeavoured to interpret his beams in a kind of rough poetry, and the strain seems to me to be after this fashion: "When you see me, the sun, you see the best outward image of God that is ever possible for you to see until you receive your resurrection body; here am I pouring out all this fiery glory, and I want you to look at me, and see something of the munificence, the lavish redundance of the divine generosity, and all you have said is that it is hot to-day! O poor atheists, would God I could get at you with my poetic significance and ideality, then surely a man here and there on the summer-lit earth would fall down upon his knees and begin to pray, even if mistakenly he prayed to me, my own poor muddy self lightened up into this majesty of light. But men have not seen me, the sun, as I meant them to see me, my ministry has failed, I almost long to be involved in my own fires, to be lost in my own infinite furnaces; for you have not seen me, you have not heard me, you are atheists in the face of the summer noon." And what has that dear, sweet old mother moon been trying to do? She has been trying to express the smile of God. She could rise no higher, she has no thunderous power, she has no sway over planet teeming on planet, but she seemed in her own motherly fashion to be saying, "It is God who smiles thus gently, tenderly, and lovingly upon the darkness and the whole night of human life; do not mock me because I am not a king; I bring you this little handful of light, it is all I can bring from the great parent fountain of glory, and I thought I could show you something of the benignity, the graciousness, the smile apocalyptic and significant of God; but you have not seen me, you have called me harvest moon and hunting moon and new moon and half moon, and you have written my name in your calendars and your chronicles, but I have not brought you to your knees. You could have had so many fellowships and communions in prayer if you had caught the idea of moon-lit night; the time is coming, I know it, when there shall be no more moon, but still now, even now, we may have a few nights in which we can intercommune about God and truth and life and destiny: what say you, if this very night—why, if you would promise me I would come

out earlier possibly that we might hold high tryst and sacramental communion within the sanctuary of the shades: come!"

No more violence, no more destruction, no more wasting. All these things exhaust themselves. Whatever burns is burning itself out. But if we could get behind the burning and see the meaning, then we would know that burning of that sort such as Moses saw at Horeb is a self-renewing burning. So that we read further in the context that the sun shall be as it were restored with another significance. "Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for"—God will give them both a new handling, He will take them up into Himself—"the Lord shall be thine everlasting life, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." I knew He did not make all these big things for nothing, and I also knew right down deep in my heart that He had man in view when He made every one of them. He has always been thinking about man. Once He said He would make man, and before that He said He would redeem man; He would redeem man before He made man, He would do something before the foundations of the earth. These are great expressions, they have no dictionary meaning; you must know them in the heart, or be poor for ever.

All the universe is a scaffolding within which God has been building a fairer universe, even heaven. How we do mistake the scaffolding! And how unutterably we mistake the sacrament, whether it be the sacrament of blood-drinking or bread-breaking in God's Son's name, and how we mistake the sermon. There are some people—I cannot tell and will not inquire whence they came—who can see nothing in the sermon but the divisions. They do not know that a sermon is a soul, not a shape; a breath, creating, stimulating, a wondrous influence on the life. "What did the preacher say to-day?" "I do not know." "Did you like being there?" "Yes." "Why did you like being there?" "I cannot tell, but I feel larger, happier, quieter, nobler for having been there." That was a good sermon. You can never get the ideal observer or the ideal hearer. We cannot do without the material and the visible

and the transient, and we are never satisfied. When the sun blazes upon us week after week we say, What trying weather! everybody is dying of thirst, everything is perishing in garden and in meadow; there will be no harvest this year. Poor old man! He has told me that all the years of my life; there never was going to be any hay, there never was to be any harvest worth gathering, and it was really of no use doing up the garden, because things were dying of thirst. And then he took to making forecasts, and they all turned their back upon him. How dare these men read their own forecasts? But they always read them in secret, so we cannot see the blush. And yet God keeps the universe moving on, and we have wonderful displays of His gracious providence in the fields that were to have no harvest, and in the meadows that were to have no food for the cattle. O Thou loving, ever-stooping, condescending God, Thou hast undertaken to keep the house for us, and Thy children have never wanted bread. O Lord, do not leave the seat of sovereignty, otherwise Thy creation would perish; train us by disappointment and by pain and by the manifold discipline of Thine own wisdom, until we do at last—last—last come to say, Thy will be done.

God has always been moving along the line of progress. This is His programme. "For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron"; everything shall change places with everything else. The Lord's providence is a great movement, a continual action and interplay, and no man can stay the action: it is God's. O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him, and He will give thee thine heart's desire. And again He says that He will still proceed to develop His original purpose: "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree." "Instead of—instead of—instead of"—that is the programme. O thou sluggard, arise, and, thou blind man, try by prayer to recover thy sight that thou mayest watch the way of God. Some people never can be made to understand this law of evolution or development; you cannot drive the sense of it into their indiarubber

heads, you can make no impression upon them. "Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree"—why do they not hear the whispering of that voice amid the thorns, and say to the thorns, You shall not always crackle as if in a fire, and you shall not always prick those who would find a pathway through you. "Instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree" —always something better, something sweeter, something tenderer. We have not heard all the notes in the Divine voice; no musician can measure the gamut of that utterance.

Here then we have great promises to live upon. I do not know how the great work of missions is to be consummated and accomplished; sometimes it seems to me, as it does I am sure to many of you, utterly impossible that nations lying in darkness can ever be made to see the great light. If it were to come of our seeking it would never come. I hear a great resounding note in the innermost chambers of my soul, and I live upon it. When the Lord has made great promises doubt has stepped in, scepticism has uttered its poor mean whisper,—and when have I said to myself, "Lord, give me some confidence that Thy Church is in the right road in trying to recover and hold the world for Christ, the whole world for the Cross and through the Cross," the answer has been, "Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." Sometimes He has varied the great assurance, and the prophet has concluded his most glorious prophecies with the words, "For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." That is enough; increase my faith in that word, and I shall know that the Cross will not be removed until its tender crimson light has shone upon every continent and island, every sea, every mountain top and every valley. And as for thee, thou grizzly gruesome Death, there shall be no more death; and as for violence and bloodshed and militarism, there shall be no more violence or destruction within the borders of the Lord. These are great words, so great that no man can ever have spoken them. We know thunder, and we know that no man can mimic its music.

[*Thursday Morning, June 6th*, 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we grieve Thee day by day; we have oftentimes almost quenched Thy Holy Spirit. We have narrowly escaped the chambers of death, we have had but a foothold in a yielding place. Yet, by Thy grace, we are in the house of God to day, we are praying to our Father, we are communing with the Eternal; great visions of light shine upon our souls, and therefore whilst we live we may hope, such is the abundance of Thy grace, such the tenderness of Thy pity. We have grieved Thee, but we would grieve Thee no more; we have said hard things against the Lord, and our hearts have rebelled against His providence. There is none righteous, no, not one. We come, therefore, by way of the Cross, that we may kneel, yea, prostrate ourselves before Thy throne, and ask for the all-redeeming love and the all-purifying blood. Let the Lord hear us, and we shall be holy and glad and young. Amen.

CXLIV.

WRONG IN THE HEART.

"*It is a people that do err in their heart.*"—PSALM XCV. 10.

THE text is profoundly pathetic. The text startles me like a revelation. Speaking reverently, yet with strong confidence in the truth of what I am about to say, it would seem as if God Himself had been astounded and surprised by a great discovery. We have to adapt human terms to divine uses. Think how the text comes in. It is uttered, as it were, after forty years' experience of a certain people. The text may be paraphrased thus: "I thought better of these people, I hoped much from them, I showered My mercies upon their lives; I was with them in cloud or fire day and night, I found for them bread in the wilderness and water in impossible places; yet they tempted Me, proved Me, and saw My work; and now I begin to feel

that this mischief is deeper than the external: these people do err, not in their judgment only, or in their occasional prejudice, they are wrong in the soul, they are rotten at the heart: I must say it, though it darkens heaven to make such an announcement about the chosen of My love." We know what this is in common human life; we give people credit for such and such good motives, we say sometimes, "They have erred in judgment, but not in purpose; they have wounded us without meaning to do so"; and then at last offence is piled upon offence, and mischief follows mischief, until we are compelled to say, They are bad at heart, they are putrid before God, they are fit only to be delivered over to death. We say all this as if it had at last come suddenly upon us, as if we had hung on to the hopeful side as long as we possibly could. We have said, No, he is better than he looks, she is fairer of soul than she would seem to be through the medium of her occasional conduct; probably she will be better to-day, almost certainly he will return to-morrow; we cannot give up this case or that. And then at last our own poor solicitous love is obliged to drop down dead, and we say as we fall, They erred in their hearts, their very souls were putrescent. A right beautiful thing it is that we should be clung to and hoped for till the very last. When a man's own mother shuts the door in his face, depend upon it she has gone through a sad experience. We do not shut doors under the circumstances we have now in view until we are literally compelled to do so, to bar out our own flesh and blood, to disown the child whose cradle we shared —our brother, sister, and one's dearest loved one. Parents know what all this means. The father wanted to shut the door sometimes, but the mother made it difficult for him to do so; she drew a bolt or placed a stone or did some other little trick of love, so that that night at all events the door could not shut. And then, after shedding inward tears, making the very heart moist with the river of grief, she took away the hindrances, and said, Let the door be shut. It takes a long time for some people to reveal themselves. Blessed be God, the mother is the last to receive the revelation; she may know many things in

her heart, but she never spake them with her tongue; never did she dip the pen to write the damnation of her child. Yet one night, all nights in one, she said, I cannot hold out or hold on any longer; I must give up; O my God, if I saw a dog in my sorrow I would go to the relief of the creature; wilt Thou not come to such pain as mine? Let the door be closed.

When we get this view of human nature we shall begin to sigh and long for the Gospel of redemption, reconstruction, deliverance from death. We must get at the notion that people, including ourselves first and foremost, are in the sight of God wrong at the heart. It is there that revivals take place. A revival is not a reformation; a true spiritual revival is not a universal washing of face and hands. That may be a poor, mean device; it may make much noise, it may even fill columns in the paper, but it is all wrong, or my Lord was mistaken when He gave His back to the smiter and His cheeks to them that pluck off the hair. What is it that I hear now? I hear men say in accounting for this or that distressing feature in human life and conduct, "It is largely a question of environment." How often have I reminded those who are my fellow-students of the Holy Book that this word "environment" is misconceived and misapplied when it is intended in almost any degree to explain the degeneration and rebelliousness of the human heart. Have we not said again and again that the whole question of environment was disposed of in the garden of Eden? Can you improve that environment, with the river and its four branches, its trees and flowers and singing birds, and the heaven blue as the brightest azure, and night disinclined to lower its darkness over so fair a prospect? It was there man fell, not in some metropolitan slum, but in the fairest paradise planted and nourished by the Lord Himself. Why do you drag in that foolish word therefore as accounting for anything that is really profound? For some local things it may in part serve to account, but it does not touch the original life, the early lapse, the paradisaic fall. There are many who have doubts and hesitations about what theologians are

disposed to call the Fall; I will not discuss that question; my business is not with the Fall, but with the fallen, the living fact, the putrid humanity that is about me and in me. Shame to burning and scorching upon those who discuss the Fall and forget the fallen. That is where the mischief comes in to so much pulpit talk and study of other kinds in more private circumstances. So we take refuge in evolution and the descent of man, and show that there has been no Fall. I say, My dear sirs, close your harangue, I have not come to discuss the Fall, I have come to help in Christ's name the poor, to save the fallen, the lost, the hell-going.

What is this I hear when men are talking about what is termed sin, iniquity, transgression, and lapses of all kinds? Do I not hear them saying something to this effect?—"It is a passing, infantile disease; all this was to be expected; these are children's diseases, and what is man at five million years old but a sucking child?" What is it I hear? They say, "He will grow out of it, he will grow out of the devil, he will throw off the moral measles; give him time, and you will see how truly pure and noble he is." I should hold that to be a very superficial interpretation of facts as they are; it is not only unscriptural, it is against human experience and consciousness. In all this men have sat down beside rivers and have taken soap and nitre and have tried to wash themselves and throw off the evil diseases which torment them, but it is not in any river that flowed from mountains of snow to wash the human heart; such water cannot get at such impurity. Man dresses himself with many decorations and adornments, and through all his embroidered frilled coats and adornments, he says, "You see what I am." And our instantaneous and emphatic reply must be, "We only see the external, the clothing, not the heart, not the soul."

Then when it comes to a question of intellectual error or misconception, what is it we hear again and again? They say, "It is a mere matter of passing opinion; he is an infidel to-day, but ere the week is out he may see the error of his way, and he may

return to the old orthodox position; he has been reading some noxious book, he has been listening to some fluent but mischievous speaker; it is therefore no deeper than the opinion of the hour, and presently that opinion will give way, and all will be right with the man." Let us lodge a protest against such poor, mean, false thinking. Life is not a matter of opinion; in any department of life we go deeper than mere opinion, that is to say deeper than merely external and transient judgment; there is something below, there is thinking, there is purpose, there is motive. We read of some people who did not like to retain God in their knowledge; it was a case, not of intellectual misconception, but of moral aversion, deadly hate to the loving God. Keep out of the way of people who wish to give shallow judgments upon profound problems. Do not believe that the time within which God's providence moves is bounded on the east by this morning and on the west by this evening; God's day is a long day, and man—little, great man—has eternity set in his soul,—a ghost, a shadow, a flash, a sudden gloom; call it by what name you please, there is more than time in the breast and the breathing of man.

So many people would make the inner life a mere question, as it were, one among a thousand. It is in reality a fact by itself; it is without parallel, it is a solemn loneliness; it is the soul face to face with its own immortality. In the text we seem to have gotten down upon the very rock of this whole question. We must have done so, because the text is an utterance of the Divine lips. The text is, "It is a people that do err in their hearts," in their very soul, in their very blood. There have been great men, great seers, prophetic and poetic men, who have had immense ideality of conception and great poetic expression. One such man said, "In sin did my mother conceive me; I was born in sin, I was shapen in iniquity." The iniquity seemed to come first. That was a bold man, and much ridicule has he had to sustain, but the ages have been with him, the eternities have voted on his side. What, then, is to be done? If it is the heart that is wrong, we must, through the grace of God, get at the heart

and work at the fountainhead of things. Do I ever bring myself under suspicion of disregarding many workers who are only cleaning the front doorstep without really getting into the very centre of the home life? I do not disregard them, I honour them, but I wish to show their limitations, and to impress upon all men that this great work of heart-cure cannot be done from without; that is all; it can only be done from within. Spirit conditions can only be met by spirit powers; there is only one force that can get at the heart, and that force is called—O hear it! an ancient term, but lost largely from the religious consciousness—that force is God the Holy Ghost. I know these are unpopular words, these terms do not fit in with the fever and the hurry of the age; but I believe them to be original terms that describe the beginning and origin and fountain of things, and therefore I cannot let them go. Will you present before the eye of your fancy a watch such as you carry with you to help you to know the hour of the day? What is the matter with the watch? "I see no reason to complain of it; the dial is complete, the figures are clearly marked, the case is gold; I will not hear a word said against that watch." The reply ought to be, "Then you are ignorant of the reality of the case; it is not the face that is wrong, it is not the dial that is wrong, the hands are perfectly right, but the mainspring is broken." Then you fittingly reply, "If it is a case of the mainspring being broken, of course there is only one thing to be done, and that is to renew the mainspring, to repair it or replace it." Certainly; now you are talking without knowing it sound scriptural theology. If it had been a case of an injured hand upon the dial, that could easily have been repaired, but it is a case of the mainspring, and the watch will have to be taken to pieces, and the skill of the workman must be addressed to the particular infirmity, if I may so say, of the machine. Now we are approaching the real centre and mystery of things. In the case of human nature it is the mainspring that is broken, it is the heart that is wrong, it is the soul that has strayed away in the night-time miles and universes from God. If such be the grandeur and pathos of the case, what shall be done? This is not a matter cutaneous. You say,

The child's hand seems to be suffering from injury of some kind. Has the child fallen? No. Has the child done anything to itself to bring upon its dear little hand these signs of trouble? Oh no. But, I say, the child has fallen and you did not know about it; the poor little child fell and bruised its little hands, and that is all. But the doctor, who has a right to speak upon the matter, comes along and bids me hold my peace; he says, This is not cutaneous, this is blood-poisoning. We will not speak in the face of an expert who takes the responsibility. I stand aside, and say to him, Do what you can for the case, as you have described it.

You see the difference. Many persons look upon society as if it were merely cutaneously affected, something the matter with the skin, with the surface of things, but the Great Healer, who hails from Gilead and brings balm with Him, says, Stand aside: this is not a question of the skin, but of the heart, of the very source of the blood stream; this is a case of blood-poisoning, life-poisoning. And I stand aside and say, Thou great Physician of Gilead, tell me what the case is; they think it has been a mere lapse, they suppose that something has happened externally, they say that all this will be cured presently by a little endurance, by a little lapse of time, and all this will be done. And He says, No, no. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in Me is thy help." It is a grand declaration; I do not wonder that the angels sang when they caught the purpose of the Advent; it would have been criminal on their part to have remained silent when the great Physician came to heal the human blood, the human heart, the springs and sources of motive and of conduct. I like that statement; it is so strong in reason, it is so well supported by fact and experience, that I rest at that point, and say, Thou hast accounted well for this sore distress, now tell me what is the remedy? This is the case in which Christ found man; He found him dead in trespasses and in sin; He found him erring in heart. We cannot get the Christian Church deeply to ponder this. Even the Church, the very cream of society as it ought to be, thinks that a good deal can be done by social re-arrangement, by longer or shorter

hours of labour, by social and international arbitraments and considerations. Oh, it makes the soul weep to hear such intolerable folly. Says Christ, Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good; heal the well-spring, and the stream will be limpid, crystal purity.

At that point we Christian ministers of all communions and churches stand to-day. Whatever the application is, it must be fundamental, internal, spiritual, complete. Where do you find that remedy? Only in one place. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Holy Ghost, dwell in my heart, take of the things of Christ and show them unto me; work Thy miracle of cleansing in my very soul, for this is the Lord's work and not the work of man. How can we get at the disease? We can never get at it. We have lost time by trying to get at it. This matter of regeneration is a matter of revelation, and this matter of understanding human nature is a matter of Divine revealing. Man knows nothing about himself really, profoundly, and adequately, except what God tells him through the medium and ministry of God the Holy Ghost. It is not for me to go and say, "I will find myself out." I cannot, I have no light, no lamp, I cannot look in at the centre of mine own heart. Even the doctor sends for a brother physician when he is ill. He says, The physician can see further than the patient, and although I myself am a physician, yet I must have another physician to overhaul me, to consider my case, to make an estimate of my symptoms. And is it poor little wasted, self-destroyed man that must set up as his own doctor and say he shuts all the world out and will discuss his own case? Why, in physical diseases and infirmities and incapacities we have external consultations, we have references to those who are expert in this or that particular line; is it in religion alone that man can do everything himself without consulting anybody? Now the Holy Ghost comes and offers to operate upon the soul, to show us the mystery of the Christ life and the mystery of the Christian redemption. I know what I will do, I will go to my Father, and say, Send the

Holy Ghost to me to show me myself, to take as it were part of my very soul and show it to me with Thy light shining through it from the great heavens; I want to know the facts; Lord, help me to ascertain them. If I know the infirmity I may inquire for the physician. As the poet has well said, "To know one's self diseased is half the cure." It is this disease that is provided for in the Gospel; the Son of Man is come, not to destroy men's lives, but to save them; the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

There again and again and evermore we are thrown back upon the divine and the eternal. This is a great tribute to the majesty of man. He never is anywhere so eulogised, if the expression may be allowed, as in the Bible; never is he so humiliated, never is he so recognised and praised, as in the Bible. How great must he be who can be cured only by God! Surely this is no small creature, given up to some kind of magic of self-healing. Tell me, and give me to feel that what you tell me is true, that only God can save me, and you have not only shown me the humiliation of my sin, you have shown me the greatness of the Divine purpose; and I would answer it and say, Seeing that God only can save me, it must be that I was formed in His own image and in His own likeness. Wondrous Gospel! smiting a man down to the earth as with beams brighter than noonday; elevating him up into manhood and power by the inbreathing of the Original Spirit. First the humiliation, then the exaltation. The process cannot be escaped; the humiliation cannot be evaded or in any sense modified; it is the beginning fact. We start at our humiliations, and thence we proceed by the help of the Holy Ghost to see how besotted and befooled we are, and then we are led to the fountain opened in the house of David for sin and for uncleanness. Brethren, I account no other gospel worth preaching.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the great and imperishable gifts of God, be ours, until, no wanderer lost, we gather at the beautiful river. Amen.

[*Sunday Morning, June 9th,* 1901.]

Prayer.

WE have said, Oh that we knew where we might find Him! and, lo, there was all the time in our mouth and in our heart and round about us His light and His living breath. Wilt Thou now give us sweet assurance, Father in heaven, that Thou art not a God afar off, but a God nigh at hand, within the whisper-reach of the soul, so near Thou canst hear the falling of our tears? Oh that we knew this and felt it in all its sweet power! then should our lives be blessed indeed, and blessed sevenfold, and there should be warm summer in the heart. Wilt Thou come unto us now, more nearly near, closer than ever; be nearer to us than we can be to ourselves, O Thou worker of miracles, Thou God of grace? The gate is still wide open before us, we enter by that door alone; Jesus Christ said unto us whilst He was yet in the flesh, I am the Door, by Me if any man enter in what shall he find but God and heaven and rest? We have been seeking Thee in far-away places, in long words, in mysteries of our own making, in foolish and confounding controversies; we might have found Thee in our very hearts, a sweet blessing, a rich grace, an imperishable blossom. We have come to speak with God as a man might speak face to face with his friend. We come in the name of Jesus Christ Thy Son; we know Him by the Cross and by the wound-prints and by that wondrous look in His eyes. We come to Thee in Christ, and for Christ's sake we entreat Thee to hear us, and we shall know Thy hearing is our answer. When there was no eye to pity, not a tear left in the whole universe; when there was no arm to save, when all arms were smiting each other; then Thine own eye pitied and Thine own arm brought salvation. So we are here to-day, delivered by the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord; and we are here with hymns on our lips and in our hearts, and we utter them with great joy and thankfulness. We bless Thee for the pity of Thine eye; Thou dost let drop the lifted thunderbolt, and Thou dost heal us with a tear; Thou dost not come upon us in Thy great strength, but with a whisper of tender love. Thus Thou dost find the heart, thus dost Thou comfort the souls that hang upon Thee. We have tried to heal one another, but the doctor has grown faint, the physician has had to be carried out. Thou only canst heal and remain the whole night-darkness long that in the morning Thou mayest give us back to ourselves. Oh the greatness of Thy love, the pity of Thine heart, the infinite strength of Thy grace! how we glory in these, and make new anthems upon them,

for we can never tell in sufficient music all Thy love. Here are some who need pity; though they have much silver and gold, there is something in their hidden heart which only pity can penetrate. Here are some who are looking round for comforters: make Thine angels ministers and the unseen spirits messengers of Thy love. May the hour not be lost, may it be a great hour, more golden than gold, more radiant than the sun. Seeing that we pray this on Calvary, and at the foot of the Cross, and in the very sight of Christ, we know we shall not be disappointed. Amen.

CXLV.

LOOKING AND NOT FINDING.

"*I looked . . . for comforters, but I found none.*"—PSALM lxix. 20.

HESE great sentences are proof enough of the inspiration of the Book. If a book does not prove its own inspiration, nobody outside of it can prove it; it is in the book, or it is not in the book, and it is nowhere else. You do not want to re-write the text; it is modern enough for you, it is as new as your sorrow. What more do you want? Oh that men would listen to the Book, catch all its music, its thunder and its sigh! there would be an end put to much controversy about origins and authorships and various readings of difficult passages. We should feel that we were in the company of a man who knows us. If we do not feel that the preacher knows us he can do us no good. He must be a great humanity, a personality that gathers up into himself almost all other personalities. Jesus needed not that any man should testify of men; He took no references, He only gave them. It is because Jesus Christ knows us, speaks in our mother tongue, tells us all our lives, that we rush off into the city to bring everybody else that they also may hear this Speaker who knows all the decree and its outworking in the tragedy of life. Men will not read the Bible. Many men are very fond of reading books about the Bible, and they think that reading books

about the Bible is equal to reading the Bible itself. Far from it, miles from it, universes from it! Probably there are not six men in any congregation who know the Bible, are on familiar terms with its out-of-the-way places and its unfamiliar tones. They are steadfast, old-fashioned, as the stars are.

Read the whole verse; it is like the falling of a great thunder-shower of tears. "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." Say you that man wrote three thousand years ago? He wrote this morning, he is with us now, he is in our hearts. A man takes his sorrow with him more surely than he takes his shadow. These are the proofs we have to offer, these are our epistles of commendation, if so be we are true preachers, sent, the hot breath of the Sender still upon our very faces. Whatever you are, whatever your experience—if it be not the experience of some laughing fool who lives in frivolity and feasts himself on self-wasting merriment—whoever you are, if you have lived, died, sorrowed, sung, you will find what you want in the Bible in better language than you could choose. I am not sure that I have not made a needless exception in my parenthesis, for the apostle James says, "Is any among you merry? let him sing psalms." Where will he find them? In the Bible; there are no psalms outside; all these singing-bird psalms come out of the same nest. Says James, "Is any among you sick? let him call for the elders of the church." They are poor elders if they cannot heal him if he is healable. You cannot cut God's line of destiny in two, but you can do a great deal towards helping a man out of his sickness if you take the right way about it. All things for the body are in the garden. Do not suppose that God planted an empty garden, bought something from the seedsman, and flung it in. He is the garden; every flower blooms in blood. There are persons who only touch things with their finger-tips; they do not go back into etymologies and histories and roots of things. If you were to hunt that word blood, which you object so much to and shudder at—if you were to

hunt it back etymologically, you would find that it begins in blood—all things do. The white stars have the blood-mark at their heart.

Some psalms are said to be Messianic; that is to say, to have their ultimate reference and fulfilment in Jesus Christ. I do not at this moment remember whether critics and commentators have classed this psalm amongst psalms Messianic, but there are some verses here that we cannot but identify with Christ. "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and am alien unto my mother's children." So it was with the dear Lord; His own family cut the bond between them. They whispered to one another that He was gone wrong; they said to one another, in tragic whispering, "He is no longer Himself, that sweet creature, He is probably innocent enough, but I think we had better be going now, for we cannot tell what may happen." "Neither did His brethren believe on Him." That is loneliness. Then verse 9 says, "For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up." Jesus Christ almost quoted this word and applied it to Himself literally. When His mother spake to Him, and the first break came, He said, "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's house? I am not from home, I am at home." The Authorised Version is, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" The Revised Version is, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's house"—the true home, the great sky-roofed home. How is it that you have been living on small ideas and little conceptions? Why have you not joined the thunder-anthem of the universe, instead of whispering out these tremulous and hesitant atheisms? Why not? Oh the look of the Man as He broke away, for the time being, and instructively and suggestively, from His own mother. "Hide not Thy face from Thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily." Then another verse, the last we shall quote at the moment, is this, and surely it is Messianic: "They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." No doubt this had an intermediate application; but what have we to do with the intermediate, except to regard it as intermediate? Who gave us authority to

make finals? Who has entrusted us with the full-stop? Take our broken commas and semi-colons, but leave the full-stop to God. Do not be deterred by those people who say, This or that refers to David or to Solomon. Very possibly in the intermediate interpretation; but there are some things that can only be filled up by God; there are some outlines that mean the Deity. We must get into these intermediate and final readings by the power of the Holy Ghost, proceeding from God, the final Paraclete, the ultimate Comforter.

Then there are some verses in this psalm which by all reading must be regarded as non-Messianic. "O God, Thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from Thee" (verse 5). Probably that referred to David; it certainly refers to you and to me. "Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap" (verse 22). That is non-Messianic; this is religion made irreligion, wine gone sour. There is nothing so irreligious as religion depraved, narrowed, depleted of all greatness and charity. "Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into Thy righteousness." That is non-Messianic, but most human, most sinful, most perverse. It was not so that Jesus Christ prayed. Shall I remind you what He once said?—"Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do"? That was not only Messianic, it was Messiah, His very living self, when His heart was just quivering on the point of its final stoppage for that short moment. No; we cannot fail to identify the words of Christ when we hear them; we are not too old in this Christian faith to have a false Christology forced upon us. Write a new series of beatitudes; we shall soon tell whether you have caught the right music or whether you are still fumbling on some broken and silent string. Write another Decalogue; come, try your hand, ten more and ten other and ten better—come! The old Sinai standeth still; its serrated, gloomy, frowning rocks still hide that subtle light which attests the footprint of Deity.

In this twentieth verse we come upon a thrilling fact in human and spiritual experience. "I looked for

some to take pity." What a chance they lost! Why, we have all lost our brightest chances. They often occur, on the streets, in hidden places, in habitations shut against the spirit of charity. Gaping, wondering, staring stupidities, we have been looking over yonder, leagues and miles away, when there was a little child at our very feet. Sometimes it is impossible to carry deliverance beyond the point of pity; the case is beyond us, but it is something to be able to exercise a ministry of pity. The dog knows that ministry; the dog knows when a friend is coming; the dog wants to be pitied; if you shed a tear upon him you so far heal the poor suffering beast. It is the same with man. When we cannot really effect deliverance we might say a kind word. Do you know the effect of a really sincerely kindly word upon a soul that is orphaned, desolate, broken-hearted, that does not think it worth while to live? People do not always want mere money; money is sometimes the very least of the gifts that we can confer. Sometimes all that is wanted is a tone, a little anthem in one little sigh. Life in its most tragic and sensitive moods receives all the ministries, and is glad to be renewed and freshened and cheered by some gentle, fraternal, divine tone. You see this poor little child coming with her heart beating with unusual agitation, and the tears flowing down her eyes: you might keep her long enough to cure her; you could speak to her, you could speak light to her and life to her, and could say something that would create a smile. Oh, is not he who creates a smile next to him who creates a sun? But you are in a great hurry, you have got on your ecclesiastical gown and are hastening away to light ecclesiastical candles. O poor leather-hearted priest, better make the Church here, to-day, just where the dying man is, and forget the public synagogue. There are times when we may suspend regulations, conventions, and divers mechanical explanations and exposures of absolute and impious nonsense.

What good do these poor creatures do going about the city and elsewhere, climbing garrets and going into sick-rooms with the noiselessness of sunbeams? What can they do? They have no money. None. They can do a great deal, they can help the nurse

and help the doctor and do something that neither of them can attempt. To have the gift of pity! It is not a merely natural or physical gift, it is a genius. Some people have talked to me in hours of all-night and all-cloud, who have driven me to the verge of madness; they had not the gift of tongues, they had not the gift of silence, they did not know the masonic grasp of the hand, they meant well, and that is some sort of aggravation of their failure. Everywhere find the gift, the genius. You must recognise this as a philosophy running through and through social life. You think anybody can clean a door-step. That is not true; it is a gift. Surely anyone can clean a window? No, only a man here and there can clean a window. Things are so misconceived, so lumped-up and massed and confused; there is no discriminating philosophy of life. If you have the gift of pity, use it; it is a rare genius. We all have a claim on each other for pity. Pity has delicate ways of doing things. Pity does not come to you with a card of introduction or with any blaring of trumpets. You find something beside you crying; it is Pity mingling its tears with Sorrow. "If you would have me weep," quoth the Roman poet, "weep yourself." A lesson to preachers and healers and ministrants of every name. True pity means some attempt at practical help. Pity struggles to be strong; it may fail, yet its failure is a species of success. The flower could be set nearer; and there is such a ministry of flowers. When Luther had to fight his greatest battles, meet learned men skilled in history and in dialectic, he took his flowers with him and set them on the table, and received their charges through the medium of the floral atmosphere, and Luther was young to the last. You would have been better to-day if you had taken that vase of flowers and put it near you when you were taking your daily food, and if you could have put it on your breast. We call that now a button-hole. Oh how we have allowed things to drop into prose, and prose into frivolity! If you had had some spring flowers mixed up with your clothing, you would have prayed better. Who can forget?—I never can. We only had a small grandmotherly kind of garden, and it

had nothing in it that was not expressible in one or two syllables. One was a wallflower, and there the poor thing had been standing out all night, but when we went to it in the morning to exchange greetings it was the flower that was freshest. And then when we went to church, to the little wayside chapel, with the mother, she having plucked a little piece of saffron-wood and put it either in her handkerchief or her hymn-book, we were all right for that day. You might be so much easier and happier. You cannot always do great things, but when the poor patient is out of the room you might perhaps just lift a window and admit the gospel of fresh air, Christ's own breathing, so that all would be right when she returned. Why, you could do a hundred things and have a renown in heaven.

Then the deliverance is carried beyond the point of pity and comes up to that kind of ministry which is denoted by this word "comforters," the whole text reading, "and for comforters, but I found none." What is it to comfort? We have explained this a hundred times, and a hundred times have forgotten it. To comfort is to give strength, to increase the power of endurance. Paul said, "I besought the Lord thrice to take away this thorn in the flesh," and He said, "My grace is sufficient for thee" and for any number of thorns—let the thorns alone. Did He comfort Paul? Certainly: "My grace is sufficient for thee." It is exactly what thou dost most require. The Lord does not always remove the burden, He strengthens the back. That is com-fort,—*with, strength.* You can comfort a man so that you will give him courage; he may say, "I will try again, this man has put things in a new light; I like his way of looking at things; he is a downright sensible man; other men have confounded me by many polysyllables, but this man has told me that if I just get beyond that corner I will see the green fields and hear birds singing in the blue air; I feel as if I could do it." That is comforting, to tell a man that there is more in him than he suspects. That is comforting, to awaken the latent ability and say, "Come, arise, the sun is shining broadly in the heavens now, and you are losing your chance; come, stand up; take up

thy bed and walk." That is how Christ comforted people. He said, "What are you lying there for? rise, and go." You say, "Well, if that is possible, I will try"—and to try is to succeed. Faith is the great miracle-worker. "Do you believe in faith-healing?" Do not be asking me any questions of that sort; I want to get at your poor broken, bruised heart, and tell you that you are more of a man than you suspect yourself to be: rise. When Jesus Christ saw a man with a withered arm, He said, "Stretch forth thine arm." To stretch is to reach. Do not slink away into indolence and indifference and self-despair; why, even you, in the eleventh hour—I would say to some man—even you, not being in hell, can yet by Christ be in heaven. If that gets well into a man's mind it sings to him, and he sings back again.

Oh to be near a man who understands one in sorrow and in helplessness—that is true ministry, that is the best preaching, that is a revelation. "But how can I help this poor creature?" I will tell you how. "I really am disposed to help this poor creature, but she does not want physical aid, she has a beautiful house and an ample table, but somehow she is broken and bowed down: now how can I help her?" I will tell you, I have come on purpose to tell you: you can help her by listening to her. Do you see? Few people can listen, as I have often said. And do not be looking out of the window whilst you are listening to her sorrow, and do not be looking at your watch and intimating that it is time you are going, you have no more time to waste upon cases of that sort—don't; either listen or go; listen with your eyes, listen with every hair of your head, listen with your whole man, and the poor creature will say after you have gone, "I never met any one who did me so much good." And if you say, "I did nothing," you did. "But what did I do?" You listened. "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered or athirst, and did such and such charities to Thee?" You are all the better for not knowing them, but the charity was done. Do you know—speaking to a particular person who may or not be here—do you know that it does not seem to be in your power to listen to anybody?

"Oh," you say, "I have no other intention but to listen." But you cannot listen; your mind is divided, your attention is distracted, you are looking out of the window. No man can listen who is looking out of the window; you must fix your soul upon the case. Oh thou blessed mighty prophet, thou didst lie down with the little child in order to revive it. It is even so, curious, impossible of explanation to those who have not the spirit in them, but a joy, a piece of trembling holy music to those who have the masonic ear. I am sorry to say some of these things to certain people who imagine that they are listening; you cannot get it into their heads that they are doing anything but listening. "I am sure," some person will say, "I did everything in my power in order to meet the case, I really tried to meet it." You may have done so, but what did you do in that sick room when I caught you there? "I was sitting watching the poor invalid." Anything more? "Nothing more." You are wrong. "What more was there?" You were reading a newspaper, and turned it over, and it crinkled and crackled till the poor brain lying on that weary pillow was doing anything but blessing you, and you did not know it. How did you put the poker down after you had stirred the fire? Why, is everything to be done upon so fine a basis and with so fine a quality? Yes. Who then can live? Very few.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us till we need no pity, and are independent of all comfort. Amen.

I am expecting a great offering to-day, for surely our hearts are conscious of the presence of the Lord.

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have heard of Thee as one who giveth to all men liberally without upbraiding. Thou art able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Our poor prayers have no boldness; they do not see Thee as Thou art in the majesty of Thy munificence and tenderness. We have poor views of God; to us Thou art often a little God, a mocking God, a most disappointing God, because we do not know the right point of vision; our hearts are away from Thee, and we would degrade Thee into our own littleness. Yet Thou art always giving, Thou didst begin at once, and Thou art going on still; far on down the slow centuries we hear a voice saying, "I will give him the morning star." Thou dost not give Thyself away, there is no exhaustion in God; behold, the river of God is full of water. We will rejoice therefore in the table of plenteousness, in the inexhaustible fountain and the overflowing river, through the Cross of Christ, the consummation of Thy gifts. We will think of Thee as Giver of life and light and love and peace, and Thyself. Amen.

CXLVI.

GOD THE GIVER.

"*I will give* . . ."—GEN. xvii. 8.

OD thus begins as soon as He can. How often have we reminded one another that everything is in the book of Genesis! You need not go round about it, you have only to go into it in order to know who wrote the book and what it is aiming at. God does not put off this great function of beneficence until a few centuries have passed by; He begins at once. As soon as the child is alive He begins to give it everything that it can possibly receive and appreciate and utilise. We say we are always giving,—but we are always telling lies. God is the giver—that is the subject—and God's first gift is next to nothing but a sign or token, some poor little light in the far-off old east, telling that something is coming, and may be had and known almost directly. You never get at God's meaning all at once; and yet if we had sense, vision of the heart, we should see in the very first gift the very last. We will not study the theology of implication; nothing can drive us to that high theme. If we were to expatiate upon the theology of implication we should be said by some creatures to be reading meanings into the letter. The folly of it all, the unfaith and the self-impoverishment of it all! We never realise with wholeness and inspiration of meaning that a grass-blade is the universe, that a primrose is a full-blown summer and the red and luscious autumn. That would be reading meanings into things. Would God there were more things read into the simplicities of the letter!

"I will give." That is the text. It is found in Genesis, and therefore in the right place; it is heard

in the Apocalypse, and therefore the great Amen cannot be far off. Let us see how the river runs, and walk by it as it were hand in hand with God.

The Lord had to incarnate Himself in little phrases and small toy meanings in order to get at man's imagination, so He says in Genesis xvii. 8, "I will give unto thee . . . land." Do not put a fullstop after "land." That is the poorest and meanest of His gifts, and would be poorer and meaner still if it did not carry with it all the other gifts by implication, suggestion, far-flashing indication of an opening universe. But the land is God's to give. The land never belonged to any one but God. We may have turned it into geology, and into geography, and into maps and covenants and leases and divers other expensive phrases, but the Lord is the Landowner, the earth is the Lord's, the fulness thereof, and the riches of the sea. Why do we not live in that grand, warm, and inspiring conception—that God owns all? "Yea, the silver and the gold are Mine; yea, the depths of the mines, and the cattle browsing upon a thousand hills are My guests. I will give unto thee the land,—the particular land, the land flowing with milk and honey, the land that is a poem, the land that grows nothing but things richly divine." And that is God. That is nothing; you have not begun yet. We begin in many beginnings; this is only one of them. Give man his armful of land, and let him call himself a landlord,—and he will want watching. But he can begin there: and God always begins where we can begin. Jesus Christ always started His parables from our types, analogies, similitudes, and varieties of self-revelation. He thought we might understand something about a sower, and about a woman putting a leaven into meal, and about somebody having deposited in the earth a very precious pearl or gem. He knew we could begin there, so He began there. He wanted to begin higher up, He said, "I want to teach you heavenly things, but if you cannot receive earthly things how can I go forward?" It is so that many a teacher is bound down in the dust when he longs to outstretch unseen wings and fly to the gate of the morning. It is nevertheless something to know that God gives men land, and clay out of which to make bricks, and quarries out

of which to dig palaces, and forests out of which to bring navies and homes of beauty. I could not rest there; it is a poor thing to me now to have a promise of land. I seek a country out of sight; I want to declare plainly that I seek a country. Yet the land was well enough to begin with. Another man held it, tilled it, and gave me a meal out of it now and then. That was enough. The whole idea from the first is parabolic, typical, allegorical, and thus truly historical.

"I will give you rain." Of course; having given us the land, He could not withhold the rain. What is the land without rain? — dust unshaped into humanity and stewardship and responsibility,—a poor waste, nothing but dust, that cannot grow a flower. Now I feel to be warming towards this great notion of the One-Giver and All-Giver. "I will give you rain"—soft water, the kind of water the roots like and pine for. Surely all the poor roots are praying about this time of year for another shower, and another, yea, though it be mixed with thunder and be flashed through with lightning, still it is the soft water of the clouds, and we poor roots are perishing for want of rain. I could not stop there; it would seem from some points of view to be a good stopping-place, but it is not. We have done nothing yet beyond receiving the elementary and the symbolic. We have now passed through poor mean arithmetic and got into a kind of symbolic algebra, and now we shall work fuller sums, and presently come to great figures that will read like answers to riddles that will flash upon us like the secret of an enigma. It is something, therefore, to know that it is God that gives us the rain. There is nothing much more pathetic to me than to see a man struggling uphill with a water-cart; he calls it watering the roads. And what is richer in another kind of pathos than the clouds gathering themselves to pour out their riches in a great wealthy rain, every drop a blessing, every current something that falls from the river unseen? Never dissociate God from land and from water; they are both His, He only can give them in any sense that will bring with it satisfaction. There is a way of appeasing hunger that

does not touch the deeper inner hunger of the other self,—that excites a man and mocks him every day.

"I will give thee——"—what more can He give? He has given us the land, He has given us the rain, He says, "I will give thee riches and wealth and honour." Is there a fountain of honour in the universe? Yes, and if we seek it not, we shall find it sooner; if we do not go after riches and wealth and honour, the poor weazened things will come to us. Snub them, rebuke them, and they will come round and ask you to take them in. Why, there was a sweet Teacher who said, If a man found his life, he would lose it; and the same sweet Teacher, fairer than the morning, said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things"—mere trifles, promiscuous etceteras—"will be added unto you," thrown in. The Lord said, "Because thou hast not asked for thyself riches and dominion and honour and fame and pomp and circumstance of a material kind, I will . . . but because thou hast asked wisdom, thou shalt have all the rest: thou hast secured the kite, do not trouble about the tail, it always dangles after the soaring kite." Young men of the City of London, you may have begun at the wrong end, you may have begun with the riches and wealth and honour, and all that is called a gleaming and radiant invironment. You should have begun at the other end—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God"—that great kingdom invisible, omnipotent, infinite. You cannot hinder it, but you can put it in its right place, and in the selections made by your souls you can put it first.

I do not care for any of these things, land and rain and riches, except they are the forecast, the first-fruits, the beginnings, elements, and skeletons of things. God never talked like that if He meant to draw a fullstop at any of the points. He is leading us, educating us, preparing us. Oh the sweet mystery, the great delight! He is watching us. He says, They have got the land and the rain and the riches, now what more will they have? for what more will they ask?

Now He begins a higher style of talk. He was

condescending all the while to get at us, so lowly was our place in the pit. Now we are coming nearer to the light. He says, "I will give you pastors according to Mine heart" (Jer. iii. 15). This is better; a pastor, if I was really my true self, I should regard as better than land, better than rain, and better than gold. What is a pastor? A shepherd. In what sense? Caring for us, bringing messages from God to us, comforting us, making night bright with new stars till we seem somehow to gather them into one great brightness that might be taken for a morning already on the hills. Why, each one needs a pastor, not in some narrow or mean ecclesiastical sense, but a shepherd-heart, a friend with the great soul, who says, "I have been just as miserable as you are; you say you lost him, lost her; so did I, I know how deep the grave is, and I know where He is who is called the Resurrection and the Life." If a man talks so to me, be he ploughman or prince of the blood, he is to me pastor. Therefore would I have all my brother pastors great in heart, tender in sympathy, caring for and loving the worst, the lowest, the basest, and giving every life to feel that the sunshine is not all gone. When I come out from my pastor's church or house I want to come out with glad tears in mine eyes, because he has shown me that all things are bigger than they first looked; he is no literalist, he sees the fiction and poetry of things; he looks at all that is round about and all that occurs in life in the light of a parable painted in blood. Woe to the land when it is bereaved of pastors, whether in the pulpit, in the home, in the school, in the press, or anywhere. We want the pastoral heart that would die for us if it might.

Now this is becoming much nearer what was first meant. I knew that when God said He would give us land He was only beginning where we could begin. He promised land and rain and riches, and then He gave us pastors and friends and teachers and other hearts, the hearts that make the complement of our own, the other half of the sphere, without which we are mere hemispheres. Now we are getting into life, manhood, sympathetic, noble, living manhood. You see, in the Bible we read up, we do not read down.

Our journey's end is now in view. Our great God gave two people once two thick skins to save them from the cold. I know what that means; He has given me an eye to see His meaning; it was not confined to the skins. One day He says, I will clothe your soul. He gave the people really curious seed-like things, coriander seed, and He gave the people manna, and they said, "What is this?" They have always been raising questions in the human mind. "What is it?" and they said it was for their hunger, and they stored it, and enjoyed it for a time, and tired of it. But still the great teacher, Hunger, was in that wilderness-school, and hunger drave these poor murmurers to the Lord. I know what He meant. He says one day, I will give you food for your souls. On the occasion referred to last He said, "I will give you pastors after Mine own heart"—bits of God's own heart, fragments of His infinite love, souls that have received the kiss and will impart it to despairing spirits.

He is coming very near us now. What can follow such gifts—land and rain and riches and pastors? He said, "I will give unto thee a son." That was a wondrous revelation. He said to old age, "I will make thee young again with a son, thou shalt have a laughing child at the fireside." I was sure He was not going to end with land and rain and riches, I was quite sure He had another meaning. "I will continue thy life, I will immortalise thee, I will cause thy children to be as numerous as the stars and as countless as the sea-sands: I will give thee——" I could not stop even there, there must be something beyond, still nearer—a son. Now read me a text that includes them all and concludes them all. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." So loved—that He gave. That is the way to love. He lives to give. That is love. If you take all in and allow nothing to flow out you will one day find that your great gathering of water has burst the cistern or the deep reservoir and has gone. You come in the morning and say, "I have an abundance of water, but I will not give you any, but you may look at it and see how rich I am; this is the reservoir, walk up this green slope, and I will show

you what is worth more than crystal." We say, "I do not see it, where is it?" "Wait a moment and you will see it, over this little hillock." And we climb the hillock, and look, and the water, the gathered, stored water, kept from the poor and the needy and the thirsty, has gone. God will take it all up again into His sky and turn it into rainbows and into showers and pour it upon worthier receivers. They are storing poverty who are storing gold without God.

Now I see something of what He meant. From the first I was sure that He was going to open a great subject; so He began, let me repeat again and again, where we can begin. We have often told that this is how He lured Abraham from his nest. He said, "I will give thee a land, Abraham, a land flowing with milk and honey: come!" and Abraham said, "I will require my staff and my sandals," and he started out to find the land flowing with milk and honey; and when he got there he would not have it. That is how God trains us. He begins at our low conception, and then He weans us, educates us, and gives us higher conceptions and broader ideas, until the idea with which we started fades away, and is of no consequence to us. We have grown away from the child-notions; now we give the toys to some other child. Thus does God educate His people. Have you ever walked by the river of God's giving? It is a long river; I have tried to walk it every step, but I have failed. I said to myself not long since, "I will walk with God if He will permit me hand in hand, and I will see the length of this great love-stream." But it was I who failed, not God. He said, "I will give thee rest; come home, and I will give thee a reward, I will give thee a heart to know Me, I will give thee a heart of flesh: ask what thou wilt, and I will give it thee." And on and on we passed along the banks of the rivers of comfort, until His very munificence, His infinite bounteousness, led me to cry out, "Lord, give me time, for this great stream, which is flowing from Thine own heart, requires rest, that I may think and pray and wonder and do something in return."

You say you are always giving. I may be the victim

of the same delusion. The fact is, we have not begun to give; what we have done is simply to show a sign of what we would do if we could. Blessed be God, there have been many such signs. Taken in their true content and significance, they are one of the main vindications of the Christian faith; they illustrate the richness and the sweetness, the depth and the grandeur of the Gospel idea. We are set as exemplars. I give nothing; what I do give is just a sign of what I would give, if the devil were dead and the flesh were no longer a burden. Even that is some indication of progress. And we ought to thank God; for we cannot all give money, but we can give perhaps time or talent or influence, we can make some return for the great benefactions of heaven.

There is another side to this subject, and I turn my back upon it, because it is so terrible. There is another set of texts—have any of you nerve to preach from that set of texts? You brother ministers, are you young enough and courageous enough to preach from that parallel line of texts? I cannot now; I might have done so long years since. But if you will collate the passages that have the same beginning as the text, "I will give," you will find judgment and thunder and fire and pestilence and ruin and hell. I cannot preach along that black line, I would remain by a river the streams whereof make glad this poor life. But all these threatenings are there, as well as the promises. If you took out these analogous words, wrote them down on a fair sheet, and read them in their gathered consolidation as one lesson, you could not live, you would be beaten as with thunderbolts. It is terrible reading; our God is a consuming fire. But I cannot preach from that side of things, because I need the other so much. But surely there are some of you pastors young enough to say, Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men to turn the terror into an evangel, to turn the judgments of God into the gospels of His heart. What a tribute all this is to the grandeur of man as he was originally conceived in the mind and purpose of God! That he should be worth all this, that such a hound should call forth such a scourge,—surely this is in its own way a kind of tribute to the original majesty and

future of man. But I cannot preach from these great fire texts now. I cannot even comfort my friends who are in great suffering, I break down in my mean attempts to heal them; but I ask them to be so good as to allow me to put out my hand to them in the darkness that I may feel for theirs and give these hands the grip, the pressure, that means, "I would help you if I could."

It will presently be thirty-two years since some of us shook hands in the Lord. They look nothing when I turn back to count them; they are short, sharp breathings. Yet what misery we have known, and what joy; how often have we responded to the bell ringing us to the festival, and how often have we accompanied one another to sad places! Some of you were not born when I began this pastorate, others of you have been with me nearly all the time; and some have given thanks—but where are the nine? Let us take heart, let us trust in God. He giveth even now grace upon grace and strength upon strength.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us, till we hear the sweet voice saying, I will give thee the morning star. Amen.

[*Sunday Morning, June 16th*, 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, will it please Thee to cast out the spirit of fear? We have heard that perfect love casteth out fear: is not perfect love Thy gift through Jesus Christ Thy Son? We are not ourselves, because we are afraid; we have only half our strength, because of our cowardice. Will it please Thee to drive the shadows away, and send into our hearts the spirit of living love? Then shall we do Thy will with loving obedience, none daring to make us afraid. We beseech Thee to hear us in this great prayer, including all other prayer, and it can be answered and sealed by God's own amen. We are poor and weak and feeble, and daily our strength ebbs from our heart; we know how little we are, and we despair of ourselves. Help us to believe that our strength is in God, and our courage in the Most High; may we look unto the hills whence cometh our help, and say, Our help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth; He will not suffer our feet to be moved. We bless Thee for occasional rapture; our enthusiasm is intermittent; behold, our voices are like the trumpet and the thunder, and lo, soon they sink into the whisper that cannot be heard. May we not live in rapture, may we not live in continual ecstasy of faith and love, that we may know the higher ecstasy of service? We bless Thee for all our individual comforts, for all our household defences, for all the riches of Thine hand seen in our daily life. Thou dost give us water and bread, Thou dost anoint our head with oil, Thou fillest our cup until it runneth over: what shall we render unto the Lord for all His benefits concerning us? On every life there is some seal of love, no man can say unto Thee that Thou hast forgotten him: or Thou wilt reply, For a small moment have I forgotten thee, but with everlasting mercies will I gather thee. Enable us to take this high view of Thy providence through the medium of the Cross of Christ; then we shall be no more sad, but for a passing moment, and gladness shall be the key of our lives. The little child cries because of some necessity, and the old man's prayer has sunk into a sigh, and all the leading ones who are conducting the affairs of the world put out their hands to grope for something without which they cannot live. The Lord hear us and pity us, seeing that we are now at the Cross and the eyes of our hearts are on the red blood of sacrifice. Amen.

CXLVII.

ALWAYS WITH GOD.

"*When I awake, I am still with Thee.*"—PSALM CXXXIX 18.

UNDER what conditions did the psalmist make this declaration? He said, "When I awake, I am still with Thee." Where else had he been? He had been asleep; the reference is to natural sleep, but I am going to broaden the outlook and say next to nothing about that natural sleep. Still, confined to that little event, it is a very marvellous text. "When I awake, I am still with Thee": I have been in the darkness, and I should have been lost there, my dream teacher was grim, and the darkness was full of nightmare and sorrow and bitterness, but lo, when I awake, it is all right, I am still in my bed, I am still in safety, I am still in my house, I am still with Thee. I want some sweet singer to take my text, and relieve me of it; for prose is poor, and even if a man could be eloquent he would sigh to be musical, and I want that singer to take only these eight words. It is wonderful what the musician can do with eight syllables. The preacher dare not do it, the preacher is not permitted to rise and fall, and go away and return; he would be accused of tautology and repetition. Why, oftentimes the eloquence is in the repetition, it is nearly always so in music. I want my sweet singer to compose a little hymn of which this shall be the refrain, "I am still with Thee." I could imagine a wonderful outcome, but inasmuch as I myself await the musician I must fall back upon the great teaching experiences of life and still use my refrain, "I am still with Thee."

Yet who will say it is prose to say, "When I awake"? There is no prose in that; it can be made prose by those who touch flowers only to destroy them. "When I awake," let us take that in its more ideal and poetic sense, in its higher intellectual

aspect, and let us begin by saying how well we know what it is for a man to have his eyes opened, and yet not to be awake. We must go down and pick up some of the poor pebbles of daily proverb and apophthegm and see if we cannot by long loving looking find in them the beginning of some sweet gospel. We have vulgarised the words into mere commonness and all but spiritual worthlessness; yet inasmuch as they are not quite dead we make use of them even now. We say that such and such a man is not half awake. You understand the meaning of the expression; out of that bread we may find the bread of life. We characterise some persons as sleepy, not alert, allowing chances to pass by, seeing nothing; it would require all God's thunder to get an idea into their heads. So we speak of them, so we characterise them: let us take care lest we are taking our own portraits, lest we are indicating our own intellectual and spiritual condition.

When I awake intellectually, I am still with Thee: once I did not seem to have any mind; as for intellect, I did not know the meaning of the word, I begin to see somewhat of it now in dim outline, and what I do see I like, for there is a light even in the shadow. When I was in the alphabet and in the elementary arithmetical tables, I had a very poor conception of things, I only attended to those things because the schoolmaster scourged me, I saw nothing in them for the young fancy and the young dream; but I have proceeded from step to step, my intellectual nature has been awakened, stirred out of sleep, and the more I think the more I pray; I did not know there were so many things in the world; they told me in some rigmarole way that the world was round and that it was composed of such and such features and aspects, and I remember something about geography and geology and shapes and flowers, but all passed over me because I was not awake; but since I have really begun to feel the morning, since it is no longer an outside fact in my experience, but an internal and spiritual fact in my soul, I see how big a world it is and how Bashans are hidden in single acorns. That is what it is in some sense to be really awake. The mischief is that persons who are half

awake are often consulted upon things that can only be seen when the whole soul is alive. You would not go to some half-asleep man to ask him the way through a dangerous region; you would never think of doing anything so stupid and monstrous as that. Yet that is exactly what people do in great religious inquiries; when our prayers are broken in our own hands and can no longer fly to heaven, we say, "Where is that sleeping, stupid watchman, that used to be at such and such a point in the course? Let us go and wake him, and whilst yet he is rubbing his eyes because the sleep is not awaked out of his blood, we will ask him where God is and what destiny means." No! But that is what you do, that is where you make fools of yourselves; you call out a watchman unawake, unalert, who cannot see what is going on, and who needs to be reminded of his own existence, and you ask him where the spider-web-like line is that connects the earth with the altar of God, or the heaven of the Trinity. The weary, trying, weakening thing is that men who can be alert in business and bargaining are absolutely and wilfully half asleep when the question is God, prayer, forgiveness, immortality. That is so strange and so wearying to the poor heart.

When I awake spiritually I am astounded at myself. I knew nothing about myself; I thought I was good enough so far as time permitted me to be good and circumstances allowed me to look after my own conduct, but when I awoke I saw that there was something finer than conduct, behind it, beneath it, above it. What was that ethereal, spiritual something? It was motive, disposition, spiritual impulse, moral intent. Conduct was a thing that was marked up in plain figures in the window, and I could go and buy it, and wear it, and look as respectable as other men; but when I awoke spiritually I saw that what I really needed was not something marked in plain figures in the window, but a new heart, a new life, new sensitiveness, in other words, a grander, a new personality. When I was sleeping with the dogs I thought nothing of these things; when I basked half-drunk in the sunshine and only slept to get ready to drink more, I knew nothing about these aspects of nature or of life, of motive or of conduct, of a life with a great white

throne at the end of it, and all a supplication, a prayer. It was all changed when I awoke. And who can awake me? Only God. That is the point to be remembered. It is only the God who made man that can keep man awake, and it is only God who can lead him into the deepest places of sleep that he may get his youth back again and receive the baptism of the Dove. These are our great mysteries; these are the mysteries that the people are leaving. They are testing mysteries, they are sharper than any two-edged sword; when they touch a man's nature they cut to the dividing of the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow, and they lay bare a man to the man's own self; he has to see himself vivisected, dissected, laid out in little parts and parcels; and he has to see his soul, not as the metaphysicians explain it, but as God meant it. And then we say, Lo, now we know all these great mysteries; I thought life a run, a rattle, a feast, a wedding, a burial; I now see that all these poor outlines are nothing except in so far as they indicate that behind them all and above them all there is a spirit, a slumbering immortality.

Thus it is so all the way through. When I am awake and take a wakeful man's view of God's providence, I see how much God has been doing in the sleeping time. I used to call all these things events; in my fancy I published a morning journal, and called the leading column Events of the Day. Poor fool! and I sold by retail my conception of the news of the morning. Now that I am awake, at noonday awake, throbbing in every pulse, quivering in every nerve, I see that events make up a great Bible, a marvellous revelation; I see that God takes up these little patches, and so to say makes of them a great coverlet, a great area of philosophy, experience, and suggestion. Where did I get wrong? I got wrong because I was only half awake. I put all these things into little paragraphs; that was all I had time to read just then; my one monition was to everybody, Be as short as you can, tell me in one brief line and a half how it was and what it is, and be as quick in your motions as you can, for I want to forget all you say as quickly as possible; now let

me have it in short paragraphs, in one-sentence statements, for I have no time, I want to get back. Back—where to? to sleep. But when I awoke, when I was really awakened by the invisible hand of the invisible God, I began to see shapes, to hear voices, to interpret shadows, to fill up interstices, and to get at the unity and the consolidated meaning of things. Who cares for all these now? It is not the day for this weaving and knitting and collecting of things apparently inchoate and incoherent and falling to pieces because of their want of continuity. "Cut it short!" Ah! Almighty God, this is what they have been doing with Thee these later years, they have been cutting Thee short; they have been throwing interruptions in Thy way, and when Thou wast about to speak Thy most tender, musical, loving, alluring word, one vulgar man coughed his loudest, and Thy music was lost. Oh that men would connect things, bring them up into coherency and unity and final meaning.

Now the singer says, "When I awake, I am still with Thee." Always with God, without knowing it sometimes. I now begin to see that I live and move and have my being in God. Oh, it is all so mystic, so wondrous! I used to desire to fall asleep that I might forget everything; I have got so far on the road of progress that I sometimes say in my poor bedside prayer, "Lord, send me to-night a dream of comfort, a dream of light, a dream of song." And then I do this, as you do it—which is the most perilous experiment that a man can conduct or have any hand in conducting—I fall asleep. We have taken the poetry out of that expression and made it flat prose. "I fell asleep," says the man who does not know what sleep means in its innermost purpose and providential interpretation. That a man should willingly and eagerly go out of himself, leave himself as a half-dead thing on his feather-bed, and go away whence he may never return—oh, that is surely, if properly interpreted and understood, a deeply religious act. And yet men who throw themselves into that invisible power and presence and sanctuary called Sleep, dare not throw themselves by faith into the heart of God. They make arguments about faith and catechisms, and

cross-examine and puzzle, and one man tries to rob another of his faith. Suppose a man should say, "Now as to this going asleep, well, I do not know much about it, I think I will sit up all night; it may be dangerous, who can tell what might not happen when I have not my revolver at hand, and when I am unable to grope for the bell-rope that I may ring a stranger up to help me in my distress? I think I will sit up all night. That seems to be the right way of doing; you cannot tell what this miserable, mysterious sleep is made of; who invented it, who guarantees it, who will be responsible for my coming out of it?" Poor fool, undress thyself, and get to thy pillow. That is just what I would say to people in religious inquiry. We find a man here and there and yonder saying, "I do not know what this faith is, giving myself wholly away, plunging into nothingness." That is what the planets do; but of course you would not like to be a planet, but that is just what all the great suns and stars and constellations do; they plunge into nothingness. "The Lord hangeth the earth upon nothing," said the old patriarch. When we come to apply all these analogies to faith, and say, "Man, make the great venture of faith, leap off all earthly and material standing and leap into the bosom of God," there comes a knock at the door to tell the man that the coals have arrived, and he must get them in; and he falls away from spiritual companionship and aspiration, and gets back to an occupation more suited to his half-awake state of mind. Yet what I want to say I will say again. Never go to a man who is half-asleep to ask him to do anything for you that you can get any waking man to do. Plenty of people give religious advice like this, never having tested their own advice, never having taken the infinite plunge, the bathing experiment of swimming in the infinite ocean of the ineffable love.

"I am still with Thee." One man said this in other words on a very remarkable occasion. He fell asleep wearied, fatigued, exhausted, self-despising in some degree; he fell asleep among the stones, he could not keep his eyes open, and therefore he fell into natural slumber. And as the morning crept on and all things

showed themselves in a grey light, he arose, and looking round upon all the spectres of cloud and mist and growing light, he said, "I am in the house of God, this is the gate of heaven, and I knew it not." With true wakefulness comes true religion. Get intellectually alert, and you will begin to be religious. The universe is a less place to the fool than it is to the wise man. Have we not all hours of darkness? Are there not times when we cannot see the star? and yet when we sleep, partially at least, through the weary night there comes a great evangel, a great revelation on the white hills of the east, and we say, "Why, we must have been mistaken, it was not darkness, at least it was that kind of darkness which is a quality of light. This is none other than the house of God." These are the experiences that thief cannot steal, that moth and rust cannot corrupt. We must pass through them personally and really, and not try to live upon the leavings of other souls. Then what shall come to pass? We shall say, as the east whitens and the opal rises which will die in crimson, "Lo! this is none other than the house of God—God—God."

When we have awaked from affliction we have begun to see the meaning of it, and to feel that in all the pain and weariness, in all the slow-dying hours and vigils, without knowing it, we were still with God: which is the same thing—and yet another thing; for there are samenesses that have their characteristic differences and accents—which is the same thing as saying, God was with me. Yet there is a lovely light about the human side of the expression which says, "I am still with Thee"—the poor little struggling thing telling God that it was still with Him. And then we shall grow away from that view of things and say at last in some bolder anthem, "Lo, Thou wast still with me, not ashamed of my leprosy, not weary of my trouble, not fatigued by my crying. O Thou great God, I know Thee to be the creator of the Cross."

And some of you can say, when the house is just a furnished emptiness, having lost all, "I am still with Thee, Thou living God, bleeding Saviour, Thou and I

are the only inhabitants of this displenished house." A mystic consciousness in that direction of things comes into the soul when the soul most needs it. God has left no place void that is willing to receive Him. There is less flesh, but more spirit; there is no noise upon the floor, but there is a rustling in the heart; there is no more the letter that struggles to tell the story of the soul, all that is gone, but there is a new consciousness, a new tug at the heart, a new something that gives value to everything else, and we say, "I am still with Thee."

The day will come when we shall pass through a deeper sleep, when we shall know another, a sadder experience than we have ever known. We will be taken to the valley of the shadow of death—a long valley, so dark that only God could have created the darkness — and yet somehow we shall pass through it, amid good-byes and whisperings and subdued sobbings of watching friends. And when we get to the other end and see the new light we shall receive the last awakening so far as earth and time are concerned, and at the other end of the valley we shall say, because of Christ's love, Christ's gospel, Christ's sacrifice, "I am still with Thee."

A verbatim report of the discourse has been taken and will be printed in the City Temple Pulpit. I make this announcement without fear, though I ought to fear greatly from a merely human standpoint. I made all my preparation carefully and critically and prayerfully, and for some reason, utterly unknown to me, I left all the notes at home. I do not know where the text is, I thought you would know. You can look it up this afternoon, "When I am awake, I am still with Thee." Yet there may be a providence in even these things, we may have some message to deliver that we could not have written. I believe in God.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us, until the last sleep, and on our awaking let us find that we are still with Thee. Amen.

Order of Service, June 16th, 1901.

Voluntary ... ... "Andante" ... ... *H. Smart*

Anthem 41 ... ... "He that shall endure" ... ... *Mendelssohn*

The Lord's Prayer.—*Hawkins.*

Hymn 671 ... ... "Rise, my soul."

1st Lesson. Joshua iii. 11-13.

Chant 62 ... ... Psalm lxxii. ... ... *Boyce*

2nd Lesson. Matt xvi. 13-16.

Anthem ... ... "Hear ye, Israel" (*Elijah*) ... ... *Mendelssohn*

Air.

Hear ye, Israel, hear what the Lord speaketh :—"Oh ! hadst thou heeded My commandments?" Who hath believed our report ; to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed ! Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and His Holy One, to him oppressed by tyrants ; thus saith the Lord :—I am He that comforteth ; be not afraid, for I am thy God, I will strengthen thee. Say, who art thou, that thou art afraid of a man that shall die ; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, who hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the earth's foundations ? Be not afraid, for I, thy God, will strengthen thee.

Miss Stanley Lucas.

Chorus :

Be not afraid, saith God the Lord. Be not afraid ! Thy help is near. God, the Lord thy God, saith unto thee, "Be not afraid." Though thousands languish and fall beside thee, and tens of thousands around thee perish, yet it shall not come nigh thee.

Prayer.

Hymn 707 ... ... "Summer suns are glowing."

Sermon.

Offertory and Organ Voluntary.

Hymn 404 ... ... "Forward ! be our watchword."

Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod.*

Voluntary ... ... "Postlude" ... ... *Greenish*

[*Thursday Morning, June 20th,* 1901.]

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we look upon all the road along which Thou hast brought us, and, behold, on the right hand and on the left are set up stones of covenant and memorial. We travel through a crowded road; we remember the Ebenezer; we said, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us, and we took sacrament in Thy sight, and vowed that we would follow on to the end. He that endureth unto the end shall be saved. Do Thou prevent us from sitting down or standing still in intermediate places; may we remember that the end is the heaven, and the reward the bright crown. "Him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, even as I also overcame and am sat down with My Father upon His throne." May we remember these words of Jesus and treasure them, and be encouraged thereby. We live upon the word of Christ; other food our souls have none, but this is enough, it is the gift of God; this is eternal life, to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God, otherwise we should have no life abiding in us. We thank Thee for the Cross and all its meaning; may we not see the figure only, but feel the divine poetry and meaning of it all. Amen.

CXLVIII.

LISTENING STONES.

"*This stone . . . hath heard.*"—JOSH xxiv. 27.

ANY people are afraid of what they call a touch of rhetorical exaggeration. It is only so because they do not know what rhetoric is, and they always fatally fail alike in its appreciation and its practice. This sounds like romance. "This stone . . . hath heard all the words of the Lord which He spake unto us." And the stones have heard a good deal beside the words of the Lord. Let us think of listening stones, of what we call dead things listening well to God's word and to man's.

"And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone"—if not great in size, yet in its purpose and symbolism—"and set it up there under an oak"—well matched—"that was by the sanctuary of the Lord"; the sanctuary is an oak, and the oak is a sanctuary. "And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us"—or a witness against us, it may be both—"for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which He spake unto us." Curious, exciting, incredible, certain. "It shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God," lest you shake off the memory of your own prayers, lest you break your own covenants, ye men of bad faith, for your history is against you. We want to apply this, not only on the divine side, but on the human side. Sometimes poetry is the only reality. How often have we quoted the word, that fiction is the greater fact. The kingdom of heaven is represented in parables, and the parables mean that we do not half understand yet what the kingdom of God is. The parables give us little hints, and flying, dying gleams of what they would say if they could. So this stone would be a registrar; this stone might be called into court to testify to the word of the Lord and to the covenant of the people. We might have so much more

religious romance; we might be altogether so much richer if we would. But how difficult it is to get poetical and symbolical ideas into secular heads! and how rash those heads often are in insisting that they know the facts: whereas they know nothing about them. There are experts in every section of the great school of interpretation. You and I know nothing as it really is. Philosophers have been trying for many an age to teach us that. We know parts of things, we see phases, but we do not see the true light and the whole of the vast divine meaning. Yet we think we know the Gospel when we hear it. Alas! it is not so. No man knows the Gospel; he knows a little of it, an introduction to it, he has taken an outside view of the kingdom of heaven; but what is an outside view of the firmament?

What a piece of rhetorical exaggeration is the Pentecost to many sawdust souls—the fire, the wind, the tongues, the whole mystery, how we gabble through it, instead of hesitating at every syllable and spending a Sabbath in every tone of the weird, grand music. The Bible is so much more than we think it is. People say it is a book. It is nothing of the kind, it is a revelation doing its best to express itself through a book. Who cannot recall places that are full of witness and covenant and solemn swearing at the altar of God to be better men, truer, tenderer, stronger? It was just here, says Memory, that you uttered that great vow before God. You remember the day? It was a sunny day in June, you loitered awhile within the cooling shadow, you uttered a prayer which the birds heard and the hedge-flowers and the blue sky. I can point out the very place; why, I think I should know it by some impressions that look like knee-prints, as if you had kneeled there and said, God pity me, if Thy mercy can reach to so low a depth. Who does not remember some mountain height, climbing which the soul says, Life is a difficulty, life is a strenuous climbing, life is a climbing worth doing, for at the top what waits us?—morning and welcome. And have we fallen back from that mountain experience and become little withered atheists, just learned enough to be worse than ignorant? It was a great prayer we prayed on the

mountain-side, it was a great vow we took at that wedding-altar: where is now the prayer, where the vow? If we had lived up to these, and gone steadily on, long ere now we would have pierced the dark grey cloud and have seen something of what goes on above the dusk and the gloom. The mountain-walk should be a witness; the very mountains should say, You did make that covenant, God spake to you just under that serrated crag, and you said with tears in your eyes that you would be a true soul. Where now? All the road and the circumference of our present standing are full of broken vows, shattered covenants, forgotten interviews with God.

Mayhap it may not be so; the fact may lie in an opposite and happier direction. We may have kept the vow; God may have so reminded us of the vow that we would not willingly get away from it, and it became at last a happy practice, and we are living in that great habitude now. May it be so! Who does not remember the first grave, the very, very first grave? who does not remember the turning of the body that meant a going-home again to find it filled with nothingness? And in that great emptiness you said, God helping me, I will be truer, stronger, more useful, more beneficent in my life. Have we kept the vow? Then blessed are we. But oh, poor and miserable to the very anguish of hell the man who, having neglected all these vows, has begun to say in his heart, There is no God. It is time for thinking, for deep and highest reflection. It is not for me to examine any man, but to examine myself, and to ask what ghosts of dead vows are haunting the air. Everything thus becomes so very significant. Every time you have handled the Bible you have told some listening stone that you had a chance of knowing something of the will and purpose of God. Every time you have heard a sermon you are either a better man or a worse. No man is the same man after hearing a sermon that he was before he heard it; a voice has challenged the soul, the air has been rent with new appeals, and the soul was told by some earnest man of God, This is the accepted time, and this is the day of salvation. You cannot be the same after hearing a sermon or attending a

religious service that you were before; you have either given God the lie, or you have taken Him at His great word. Think of the times when we have lost great opportunities: and great opportunities rejected never come back in just the same way, with exactly the same colour, with precisely the same tone of entreaty and offer. Who is the man most of all to be pitied? The man who has had his chance and lost it. "O thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime hadst thy chance, and now thou must face thy destiny. The stone heard all that you said, and the stone has in its strong heart all that I have promised. The stone may witness against us. You murmur—why? You had your chance. You once had things, so to say, in your own hand; you recall the time when all life's outward view and appeal seemed to be lying at your feet, and you could, by God's mercy, have done very much what you pleased; a thousand doors were open to you, but you drank, you lied, you neglected, and the doors were shut. There is no trial time in life; life has no rehearsal days; life goes on, and flies.

Christ had a good deal to say about stones. Said He once to people who were boasting of themselves and boasting of tneir ancestry, "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." Jesus once said to the devil, to the black face of the universe when that face tempted the Christ to make bread out of stones, "Man shall not live by bread alone"—there is no bread of your kind in eternity. God made man come up from eternity, and you could live, if God so willed it, on a word, a syllable, a tone. On another occasion the people said, "Hearest Thou not this crying and tumult? can this be permitted?" He said, If these little children and young folks were to hold their peace, the very stones would cry out, they are listening, and they will not permit too much neglect of Christ. The prayerless house may one day rush down, because the stones will stand no longer in protection of atheism so blank and horrible.

There is more in the walls than we imagine. These stones will not stand if the man in this pulpit does not preach the Gospel; they will be angry stones, they may detach themselves, they may cry out, saying, Know, thou man of the false oath, this air has been consecrated to the preaching of the blood of Christ through the Cross, and if thou darest cease to preach that sweet redemption, we will cry out upon thee, and the roof will rush down upon thine unprotected and treasonable head. Let it be so!

Our very footprints may preach. Some poor forlorn and shipwrecked brother coming and seeing them on the wet sand, they may preach to him a gospel of hope and renewed courage and spiritual blessing. We cannot tell what we are doing, no man can follow the range of his own influence. They tell me, they who have studied science, that to lift a hand is to send a vibration to the stars. We cannot follow ourselves, we cannot do things and be done with it. Fools are they who talk so! We cannot be done with ourselves even when we are dead bodies rotting in the grave, we are still going on in baleful influence or in blessed effects. So we see how foolish is he who says, I am only mine own enemy. That is not true; no man is *only* his own enemy; he exerts an influence incalculable and enduring for good or for ill. All nature comes upon us as a severe but just witness. Every harvest judges us. When the fields are yellow with living gold they say to us, You declared by the spirit of false prophecy that there would be no harvest this year: look at these fields and be rebuked. When did any farmer ever foresee a harvest that would be worth the sickle? "There will be no corn this year: such and such was the condition of affairs in March, such and such were the conditions climatic in April, that there will be no harvest this year: there is no prospect of our having any need to wield the scythe or the sickle; there is a poor look out this year." The stones heard it, and the soil registered it, and lo, August was aflame with the gifts of God. I am afraid some people will die fools; I am afraid that there will be a great harvest of unbelief not to be cut down, but to be left to wither. The stars were listening to what we said, good or bad. They are

a long way off, they are quite near at hand. Why, the sun is within whisper-reach, if we knew things really as they are: and all the stars coming out, trooping forth, to bear witness for us or against us to God. And when we begin to say, "If we had heard the Gospel we would have believed it," the stones will say, You did hear it, you know you heard it. The stones are full of the words that God spake in your hearing. The stone caught it, the sermon you forgot it treasures in its stony heart. We cannot shuffle off in that way. O, if these stars and stones and woods and fields could only suspend their attention for a moment, I could tell some lies, but they are all present and they hear everything, and there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, and nothing spoken in the house that shall not be thundered from the housetop. That is the universe in which we have to live.

There were other listeners. Your little child heard when you thought it was not listening. When is a child not listening? The little child there, four to five years of age, heard that oath you spoke under your breath, and that oath may follow the dear little pilgrim all the days of its life; it may not be able to explain why, but the oath that fell from your livid lips struck that little creature, and ever after it will hear something, and memory may help the little one to remember what was spoken that day when you thought nobody heard you curse your wife, or husband, or fortune, or life. Can you find me a sponge by the use of which I can cleanse the whole slate of memory, and begin again? No man has such a sponge at his disposal. We have to face our yesterdays. Sometimes we think we will do this or that to-day, and Memory says, You promised that before; here is the proof, read it: is this your signature? It is yellow, but look at it. "I cannot look at it, there is something coming out of it that scorches my very face, and makes my soul hot with avenging blood." The difficulty which every earnest man has with his own soul and has in his own ministry in relation to others is this, that the whole age now is given over to frivolity. Dance, music, flash, joke—another, another! and keep the devil away! Oh, it is sad, but that is the case. You want another bubble, another flash, another tuft of

smoke, as the case may be. We do not keep our yesterdays as parts of our most solid assets. Our religion is a religion of forgetfulness.

In religious life there is a habit of going for a week or a month into retreat; I have adopted that plan in relation to literature. For nearly a month together I turn my back upon all the current books and papers and miscellaneous appeals, and go away to read Law's "Serious Call," Baxter's "Saints' Everlasting Rest," Bunyan's old dream, which in reality was dreamed but yesternight; I go to read the old hymns, to read the old books, putting away the hot current stuff to read the great historical testimony. The age would be the better for that. We want retreats of a religious kind and of a literary kind and of a social kind; it might save your soul if you were to forswear society for a month. Let us go back to witness-bearing and to our own bearing of witness for God. God hears, God listens, Christ hears, Christ hears everything, nothing can escape the attention of the divine Hearer; the whole Trinity is a listening Trinity! And the stones listen, and the things we call inferior animals have wonderful uses. Let us take care! The stone heard the words of the Lord, and the stone also heard our replies. Be no longer fools and wasters of time, but heed the living God, and let no opportunity pass. Are there not twelve hours in the day? Fill them with service until to another kind of man they would seem to be the whole four-and-twenty hours of the transient day. Let us be better men from this hour. May the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost have us around that famed tree of Calvary, the tree all blood, the tree all sacrifice, that there, with the arms of our soul, thrown with affectionate, endearing hopefulness around the Cross, we may make another vow and ask God to create another opportunity; and then, when the stones tell out our history, who knows but that God will be pleased with the record which He Himself has in His great mercy created? Do not make it a little world; do not make it a secular world. The whole world should be a church, a sanctuary, an altar, and it is the Church that should dominate all affairs, the Church of Christ, the Holy Catholic Church throughout the

world should rule the world and claim its liberty in Christ.

I have received a telegram just as my foot was on the pulpit stairs. "Is God dead that no voice is raised against this South African business? Thousands await your call.—Humanitarian." I only read this telegram to assure my friends that I am utterly at a loss to know what to say in the way of critical or political judgment. I am a preacher, and as such I hate all war. I am a servant of the Prince of Peace, and therefore I am dead against all militarism. I would have the nations disarm to-morrow if I could have my way, and if such disarmament were practicable. I want to speak in one direction, and yet I feel the infinite difficulty of doing so. To think that so many people on both sides should shoot one another, murder one another, creating widows and orphans by thousands and thousands, is most horrible; no Christian man can approve of that side of the question. There are, however, questions which have political aspects, and which can only be discussed with any adequate light and effect by experts. I am not an expert. I have a hope, however, from what I have been hearing that the ministers of all Churches will be invited to sign a document calling for peace, and if they give me the chance my name shall be the very first on the list. They say that our opponents are a little nation, and that we are a great nation. There is no little nation that requires three hundred thousand British soldiers upon the spot; they must really be a very great nation, if not in numbers, then in quality, in conviction, in patriotic fire. We can only at this time pray for peace, pray for the destruction of the war spirit, and pray that the kingdom of heaven, which is righteousness and peace, may come down upon the earth. There is a sadness that cannot be expressed, and under the influence of that sadness I feel at this solemn moment.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune gift of the triune God, abide with us, until we enter the Sabbath-land, whether here or there. Amen.

[*Sunday Morning, June 23rd*, 1901.]

Prayer.

O THOU, of whom the heavens are but a dim symbol, wilt Thou shine into our hearts and bring into our souls the summer day of Christ. We bless Thee for these outward sparks and dying flames, they are good for the little time ; but we want a light above the brightness of the sun, a great day-making light. Thou wilt not withhold from us this spiritual glory if we, by way of the Cross, breathe the name of Jesus Christ Thy Son, who came up with dyed garments from Bozrah, red in His apparel, strong in strength, even to almightiness. We halt at the Cross, we linger at the Cross ; we want to see its infinite pathos and infinite beauty ; our only hope is in the Cross. We bring no price in our hands, there is no plea on our tongue but that Jesus died ; make our poor prayer a feature of Thine own omnipotence, Thou who dost answer the cry of the universe. He that buildeth all things is God ; may we be living stones in the living temple. The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner ; other foundation can no man lay : we would be built up on the foundation called Christ, the Stone, elect, precious, imperishable. We have come with our morning psalm and our morning prayer ; we will say of the Lord that His mercy endureth for ever, and we will cry unto the Lord through Jesus Christ the Saviour, that we may be enriched with all spiritual blessing as if in heavenly places. We would be no longer outcasts, strangers, foreigners, aliens ; we would come into Thy house, which is full of bread. Many are weary : wilt Thou give them rest awhile in Thine own house ? Many are sad at heart and dare not speak their sorrow : hast Thou not a quiet silent ministry which the heart alone can feel even in its remotest solitude ? And some are trying to laugh whilst their hearts are drenched in tears ; this man is prosperous, and that man is unsuccessful. Women who dare not speak their trouble and may only whisper their prayers are here ; so is the bride whose voice is heard above all other voices in glad song ; and the little child is here who wonders what it all means. Being here we are also elsewhere in sympathy, in solicitude, in high wonder ; for some children are away, others are further away still in corruption and prodigality. And the dead are here ; to us they are not dead, but live in the living Christ. Come to us, we humbly pray Thee, by way of the Cross, and let our weakness be itself an aspect of strength. Amen.

CXLIX.

THE BUILDING GOD.

"*God. . . will build.*"—PSALM lxix. 35.

IT is like Him, from all that we can gather concerning Him from His holy Word. God will put things together, God will give them shape and meaning; God will turn prose into poetry, and earth into heaven. God works by ideals. It was thus He began in the great unfolding book called Genesis. God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness"—that is the ideal; and in the next chapter God took dust and shaped it, and breathed into it—that is the concrete, the real. Observe the sequence: the ideal, the real; the word, the dust. God is the great builder, and what know we but that it gave Him, if we may say so reverently, more trouble to make the wing of a butterfly than to make the biggest star that burns in the blue night? We are beginning to feel that this may be possible. Of course we always speak within the fixed limitations of language. I have read in the book of science that an atom, an atom of iron, is an infinitely more complicated system, so to say, than a system of sums or constellations. We dare not have said so, we must have a strong authority behind us; but so it is written by the men who lead the science of to-day. No man can get his clumsy fingers round the elements necessary to mould a little cell in any flower. Some things are too small to be touched creatively or shapingly by the finger. He who built all things is God. But man builds? Yes, in a secondary and remote and very temporary manner. Against all man's building there lies this great testimony, Except the Lord build the house their labour is lost that build it. Distinguish between the outside and the inside of these edifications. Do not be content with the outside, the mechanical and architectural; these

ought to be only signs and symbols of great temples and unmeasured heavens. What a lesson is this for the little human builder and the little human architect! He builds his cathedral, and at the top there is just room enough for the birds to halt upon it. It is a poor roof. Yet how many mistake a roof for the sky—the true roof, the firmament blue, starful, abiding. How many people are there who really know the difference between a ceiling and the sky? Even in brick-building and stone-building it is perfectly true, religiously and metaphysically true, that except the Lord build the wall it will fall and crumble back into the dust that was handled atheistically. Nature is on the side of her God. This applies to all your businesses, to all your fortunes, and all your fame. Except the Lord be a partner in your business it will be poor building, it will only be a kind of throwing things together; for the Lord is the author of shapes and permanences, the gold that grows more golden by the use of it. So then the Lord is the builder of every little garden wall, and the builder of every cottage in which poor pilgrim man finds a night's lodging. God is architect, and God is builder, and He is building all things on a plan. That is the difference between the building of ignorance and the building of omniscience; between the last and abiding building, and that which is but momentary in its uses. Recall the ideal.

My answer to all the poverty and want of employment is, Rebuild London. There you have the answer to every possible phase and expression of human, material, and temporal want. But you must begin somewhere. Yes, where? In the ideal, where God began. Why do we not learn from God? There must be a great governing conception of metropolitan completeness alike in geometry and in adaptation; and then the very smallest house that is built must have a relation to the ideal centre. You cannot rebuild London in a day, but you can begin to build London in relation to a plan or ideal that has been settled by the most skilled and learned architectural genius and expertness in the metropolis. So many people never have an ideal, but live from hand to mouth,—"this will do for the time being." They have no relation to a great

plan hidden in some great office, all sketched out, the whole metropolis on paper, and yet not a stable can be built that is not related to that central thought. That is my answer to the cry of labour; that is my reply to the temporal misery of London. Rebuild it, but fix upon your ideal; let there be no difference about that, and then every dog-kennel built in stone will be related to that ideal. Then we shall have, being sober, frugal, religious, plenteousness and great peace of a social kind. Would God that the young especially would have an ideal in some office of the mind, and would go into that little office and say, How ought this to be done? how goes the ideal? Thus, and thus, so that the taking of a journey, the digging of a garden, the reading of a book, shall be related to the ideal. God said . . . God made . . . I would warn you off these little scaffolds of yours if you are building without having your plan in the heavens; I would warn you out of your temporal engagements and successes if there is really a worm in the middle. Get the worm out, and go on.

Let us hear this colloquy. "Thou shalt build an altar unto the Lord" (Deut. xxvii. 5). That is the human side. "The Lord doth build up Jerusalem" (Psalm cxlvii. 2). Thus saith man, thus God; and when the man speaks only as the agent of God it is as if God Himself were speaking, then the building is sure to be good, secure, and immovable. Many have taken to altar-building who were not called from God. They build small altars, little things they can jump over, without God brooding over the stone; they are altars of social arrangements, and little clever schemes, the outcome of committeeism, and all that kind of small self-exhausting and self-destructive pedantry. There are many plans to be had from the shop window, marked in plain figures; you can go in and buy them, and come out and lose them. It is very difficult to get any progress made in this direction, because people think that they having bought a programme have bought something that is really useful: whereas it is really anything but useful. You go by programmes; as well attempt to light a fire with sawdust. Why, sawdust could, the quantity being sufficient, put out Vesuvius. Yet

how many people are attempting to light a fire with sawdust which they can rub like dust from their own hands. But would you not light a fire with wood? Yes, but sawdust is not wood, it is wood spoiled. But that is what people are doing, and all the preachers in the world cannot hinder them. See how they bring vessel after vessel full of sawdust to light the fire. Why is the breakfast late this morning? "We have taken to lighting the kitchen fire with sawdust." That is just what men do in morals; why smile? You cannot build a character with little apophthegms and maxims and small conceptions and arrangements of things. He that buildeth character, the true Jerusalem, is God. Could I get for the moment the confidence of young souls who have all their lives on the earth before them—could I get them to start upon a plan and to fix their plan according to the plan in the ideal, what a world it would be! But so many people have no plan even for a house. They are always busy doing nothing; they have no ideal, no God-drawn plan, and they write to their friends these soft lies: "I have so much to do to-day, I cannot continue my letter." Poor, poor thing! They might have written a volume, they had time enough, but their fingers are all thumbs, and they have no ideal plan; and then they say, when they enter the order of mendicancy, "We have been unfortunate." I spring from my seat and protest against the lie. There is plenty of time for everything, but you must have a plan.

"The Lord doth build up Jerusalem," and that is what He is doing all the time; it is Jerusalem He is building, the city of peace, the city of loveliness, the earthly metropolis that symbolises a heavenly city. He is a long time about it; even God cannot be fast, rapid; He must work according to something that is in Himself, and would if it were possible be before Himself.

"My son," said one in the old days, "build the house of the Lord thy God" (1 Chron. xxii. 11). An old man starting his child, for a man is always a child to his own father. Not calling him out to a distance and saying, Here, this is what I have gathered all my years, here, take it, spend it, make

the best of it you can. But starting him on a great religious errand, sending him forth from the family roof with a great inspired scheme of things. Is it any use urging this, or are we so wanting in moral sinew that we are glad to escape our responsibilities and get out of the world as comfortably as possible? Are we dogs, or men? Is it to a judgment-seat we are moving, or to the dog-kennel of the grave? Think, and send a man out of your house with something to aim at, something worth aiming at, something to do that is worthy of manhood.

God takes notice of our building. Sometimes He may, speaking after the manner of men, smile at some of our brick-pile, bricks we have bought, wooden bricks that we shape into little things on the parlour table; and sometimes He burns to see them. He says, "They shall build, but I will throw down" (Mal. i. 4). There are some winds too high for building in; the very winds seem to come and throw down our scaffolding and the shell of our temple. I wonder what such winds are. Where do all the winds come from? How quiet nature can be!—how tempestuous! It is the same nature; what if it be the same God, and that be the reason of it?

Building that has no meaning must be a great disappointment to the builder. "Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together" (Psalm cxxii. 3)—built as a city that has meaning, built as a city that represents an ideal, built as a co-operative city, one part co-operating with another, answering another, supplementing another. No harum-scarum Jerusalem can God build. He made man, and He made him in His own image. He is still making man. Do not think that man-making work is done. Man advances a little century by century, so little we have no compasses fine enough to measure the progress. Man is going forward; man is not what he was long centuries ago. Civilisation does not come with a sudden burst; civilisation grows—grows—grows—silently, day and night, little by little, imperceptibly, but grows. And so man is being fashioned now. God undertook to make man in the image and likeness of His personality, and He will not drop the work until it is accom-

plished. "I am persuaded that He that hath begun a good work in you will carry it on to the day of Jesus Christ." One day we shall come to the measure of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. It hath pleased God to call us into co-operation in this matter. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Be workers together with God. We may have a part, so to say, in our own making, in our own upbuilding. Why, One concluded His great speech thus, "If any man hear these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him to a man that built his house on a rock. The wind blew and the rains fell and the floods came, and they all beat upon that house, but it fell not; it seemed to say with a kind of defiance, Beat on, roar yourselves out. I am founded on a rock."

Only those who are right can build. Remember, that this is the Christian position. You can alter it if you please, and take all the consequences. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid." Think of man excelling God, finding a better foundation, quarrying the earth until he has found a nobler stone for holding the edifice of humanity. "Built up in our most holy faith." The Christian education is a process of building; the process is called by the significant name "edification." Edify one another, build one another up, add living stone to living stone, but work according to the ideal, go to the celestial office every day, and consult the plan, and reperuse the specification. Brethren, the text is, "God will build," and He will build us up. Build yourselves up on the great foundation. Be built up—not puffed up.

So it is thirty-two years to-day since I accepted the pastorate of this church. I aimed to build some up by the grace of God, to make them stronger, robuster men, thirty-two years to-day, and two of us sat brooding over this new problem, and the one said, "It will be unwise to leave a certainty for an uncertainty," to which I replied, "God settles all things." I want to fall into the movement of the divine step and music. There are days of problems. Many things

are not either right or wrong; if they were, we should have no difficulty in settling them. Things are mixed, related, graded, shaded; now the right seems to have it, now the wise is in the majority, now the unwise, now we are great, now we are very little. These thirty-two years—I will not attempt to summarise them or to depict them, or to extract the supreme note out of their music; there they are. And this being our thirty-second anniversary, if I may so call it, you will offer a gift of love just as your hearts may feel.

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, abide with us until the topstone is brought on with shoutings of, Grace, grace unto it! Amen.

Voluntary ... ... "Andante con Moto" ... ... *Guilmant*

Anthem 31 ... "Sleepers, wake, a voice is calling" *(St. Paul) Mendelssohn*

The Lord's Prayer.—*Hawkins.*

Hymn 531 ... "All people that on earth do dwell."

1st Lesson. Gen. i. 1-6.

Chant 57 ... ... Psalm lxv. ... ... *Robinson*

2nd Lesson. Col. i. 12-17.

Anthem ... ... "The heavens are telling" ... ... *Haydn*

Recit. ... ... { "And God said," etc. / "In splendour bright" } *(The Creation) Haydn*

Mr. WILLIAM A. SHEEN.

Chorus ... ... "The heavens are telling" *(The Creation) Haydn*

Prayer.

Hymn 18 ... "My God, how wonderful Thou art!"

Sermon.

Offertory and Organ Voluntary.

Hymn 27 ... ... "For the beauty of the earth."

Benediction and Threefold Amen.—*Gounod.*

Cornet Solo ... ... "Les Rameaux" ... ... *Faure*

Mr. GEORGE HARLOW.

Prayer.

ALMIGHTY GOD, Thou hast said by the mouth of Thy Son that those who believe in Him are the lights of the world. Thou hast called them to great eminence, even as a city that is set on an hill; Thou hast made them pungent as salt that saves from putrefaction. The Lord grant us grace that we may discharge all these responsibilities, as well as enjoy these great honours; may we realise our duty to others, our influence upon others, and our responsibility for others. Thou hast set Thy Church in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation; may that Church be faithful as the witness of light and the bearer of heaven's own splendour. May we rise to a higher sense of what is required of us in Christ Jesus our Lord from whom we receive the cleansing of blood; may we know that we are to be without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that our jewellery is to be of the soul, that our precious stones are to be in precious thoughts and precious deeds. May we be more beautiful and spiritually attractive than was the tabernacle in the wilderness, with all its choice and glowing colours. Save us from self-contentment, rebuke us when we say to ourselves, This is enough. By Thy grace may we maintain a strenuous fight and leave no part of the soul unprovided with the armour of defence. Do thou comfort us by continual additions of strength; may we know that the Lord is with us because we can handle the day with greater facility and use than we ever handled it. Thus may the Lord testify His presence and set up before us a witness to be neither revoked nor denied. Oh, that we may be converted in God's house; now may we walk by the river of life and behold its fulness and its fertilising energy. Comfort those that mourn; dry the tears that are hot and bitter; and relieve, if but for one noonday hour, the cruelty of this world's sin and burden and pain. The Lord hear us, the Saviour hear us, the Holy Spirit hear us, inasmuch as we have clustered round the all-saving Cross. Amen.

CL.

FINE LINES OF PROPHECY.

"*Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*"—MATT. xxi. 5.

WANT to find out the fine hair-lines of this prophecy; let us study the fine features that seem at first to have little or nothing to do with the main body of the picture. Would it not have been enough to have said, "Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee"? Surely it is enough, surely the rest must be little more than verbiage. Not only is Sion told that her King is coming unto her, but that He is riding upon an ass; and this comes up from old prophecy as if it were something worth preserving, as if indeed it were essential to the picture. Are we not often too easily satisfied with broad daubs of colour? Do we pay sufficient critical attention to the hair-lines, the very fine points, the apparently little or even non-essential points? Is there not life in every tone of colour?

"Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek." Why speak of the meekness? What becomes a king but majesty? What do we want with the quiet and comparatively negative? Yet this is mentioned with specialty of emphasis. "Sitting upon an ass": had He not better have come in a golden chariot drawn by many steeds whose necks are clothed with thunder? Yet it is even so that we have the minute, critical, exquisite fine points. "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet." This seems to be a gathering-up of the crumbs of prophecy. For me, saith one, it is enough that the King come. Saith another, The prophecy must be carried out to the letter; He will not be King if He be riding on other

than an ass and a colt the foal of an ass. What are these great prophecies? They are not mere predictions; we empty the Bible by thinking only of prophecy as a species of religious fortune-telling. The prophet must never cease out of the Church. What is the function of the true prophet? It is to interpret history, and out of the past to gather the future, and by the past to be able to test and verify the present and the future. We cannot get this idea established in the head of the Church. The Church will believe nothing that is really sublime. The Church refuses her food; she might eat at the table of God, and she goes gadding after empty and deserted places. The prophet is not a man that lived many thousand years ago; He is the man of all time, the contemporary of all ages. The twentieth century requires its prophet as much as did any century in the darkened past. Who is the prophet? The preacher. What does he do? He unfolds, he evolves, he calls up all the Samuel-spirit of the past and shows God's way in the maze of history and daily providence. If any man were now to claim to be a prophet the Church would kill him, the sacrament-eating Jerusalem would stone him. Yet man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. So the prophet was found driven out, but still living; a voice, but a voice in the wilderness to them who have eyes to see and behold even in the sand of the wilderness the up-springing and out-piercing of the green blade.

This is God's way. He does not give us great masses of truth only,—"He made the grass also." Every daisy gives Him a child's smile of recognition and filial thankfulness, and the sparrow and the swallow have found their nests in the ample altar. So God will have things done finely, most particularly. Has God ever descended to particulars in this matter? He has. What said He? He said this: "This is the offering which ye shall take of them: gold, and silver, and brass; and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair; and rams' skins dyed red, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood; oil for the light, spices for anointing oil, and

for sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod, and in the breastplate." He is not there talking about great masses and majesties, He is talking about what we should call little things, minute things. He was not content to have a pillar, He would have lilywork on the top of the pillar. Who wants lilywork? God does. Is it not enough to have a pillar? No; the pillar must have poetry at the head of it, symbolism, strange figures breaking out of straight lines and recovering themselves again, if possible, into these straight lines. A wonderful thing, a thing God-taught; not mere utility. There is no mere utility in the sanctuary. The whole sanctuary is a jewel fashioned by a divine Expert, and made to gleam with divine meaning. These stones that blazed on the priest's breast seemed to the religious eye to put out the stars. We will not have this now, we will not dine at the high table, we will not banquet with the Lord. There be those who would have no such fine things and polish; but this is the method of God in providence and in Church-building, and this is also the method of God in His own way of coming. He will come with clouds; and whoever knew the clouds on bright summer days other than poems, unrhymed, but resonant with a strange weird silence and meaning? The Lord must be allowed to take His own way in the Church. The great point, therefore, is this, that as God is so particular about little things, minute and exquisite features and tracings in things material, so He is equally critical and careful about the polishing of character and the polishing of the precious stones of the soul.

We must think of this a moment. When we come to touch the apostle's idea of the Church, is it something that is, generally speaking, at least unobjectionable in form and colour? It is far from that. What is it? These are the apostle's words:—"A glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." That is the meaning of my subject, that we find everywhere in the development of divine providence, and in the formation of the redeemed Church, and in the whole culture of the religious life that which is exquisite, finely drawn, daintily coloured, having about

it the tint of morning and the glow of eventide. James says that we have to keep our garments unspotted from the world. He is not declaiming against vulgarity of crime, mere red shame or obvious and undisputed guilt; he says he will have no spot on the garment. But will a spot defile the robe? It may do; be very careful about that. He who is careful and critical about the spot will be careful and critical about broader pollutions; he who is temperate in all things will not be wanton and excessive in any one thing. God will have fine work, polished work; He disdains not the rudest instrument, but He will have also a polished shaft; and sons and daughters are to be as polished stones in the household. Everywhere care is taken about the little. If God takes care of little things in nature, shall we not take care of little things in grace? Again and again God has put out His hand to shield the bird; He has again and again in the Old Testament put out His hand to shield the nest of the bird; He would not have a little bird's house disturbed. A God who can do this in nature must insist upon fine work in character, He must have polish and beauty. Yet not polish and beauty of a merely material and formal kind; that is nothing; He will have the soul a precious stone, He will have the spirit a stone of light, a light that will affright the encroacher and the thief who comes by night to do the devil's work, so bright shall be that jewel-soul that the thief shall take alarm at it and flee away. If this is Christian character who then can be saved?

But we do not begin at this high point. Some of us began blind; the greatest amongst us was three days in darkness. Who can tell what stars gleamed in that cloud? Who knows what voices found their way through the ear of the soul whilst the threefold night was gathering around the spirit of the great Apostle? I am thankful for that word; it is full of cheer, it gives the meanest of us a place, a chance, in the house of God. We are crude, we are misshapen, we are aught but attractive and fascinating at first, but the Lord's miracle proceeds little by little. Have you seen a man grow under the

influence of really deep spiritual education? I have often done so, many of you have done the same. Why, were it not too personal, we could compare our long-ago self and the self of to-day with regard to knowledge and grace and tender piety. Verily, it is by such processes of comparison and contrast that we come to understand what the greatest of our brethren said: "If any man be in Christ Jesus he is a new creature." And who can tell the meaning of that word "new"? Our poor English language has only one "new," but another and richer language had two words representing the ideas of new: not merely new in shape or new in possession, but new in quality and in the realisation of that eternal organism which unites the universe—the new old, the old new, both Testaments gathered up into one Bible. We shall never get this exquisiteness of spiritual beauty except by continual communion with divine ministries; in other words, without constant companionship with the Holy Ghost.

The character is not thus beautified and polished by one stroke. The sculpture that you look at has a thousand, it may be thousands, of little dimples struck into it by a fine point guided by an expert hand. So we are not roughly hewed, chiselled in a day or two; being likened unto divine and living sculpture, God must have us under His hand every day, and little by little He will find the angel in us, and the stone taken out of a quarry shall burn like an angel-lamp let down from heaven. The great danger that we are under is that we are content with things in the mass. Why, we have several expressions in our common language that we ought to get rid of. We say, "Take him altogether"; then we say, "He is good on the whole"; then we observe that "He is not at all unworthy in the main." These words must only be intermediate, we could not stop there, it would be a mean inn to loiter in even for one night. But seeing that we are undergoing processes of evolution, and sculpture, and training, and educating, ministries without name but with continual and most subtle influence, sometimes it is a good tribute to our earnestness, under the ministry of the divine providence, that on the whole we are not so bad as we

once were. Let no man therefore be discouraged, let no man fasten his mind upon an ideal, unapproachable, haughty, austere, remote; but let him fix his mind upon the ideal Christ who comes down to us to help us to get up. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross," that He might raise the world and burnish it as a gem that shall flash in His own crown after all the centuries of time have evaporated.

What other words are there in the Bible indicating this fineness and exquisiteness of tracery? There are many such words; take this example: "The beauty of holiness." When we think of holiness we properly think of it reverentially, we are awed by that gleaming spotless whiteness; it is a terrible sight, the soul crouches and cringes under it. Yet it hath pleased God now and again to wed that word to some gentler term that enables us to approach the meaning more familiarly, yet not without awe; so He speaks of the beauty of holiness, the beauty of righteousness, and He has taught men to speak of the great temple as being represented by strength and beauty as the residents of the altar. Sometimes I cannot go to the strength because I am too weak; strength in any form would appal me; then I go to the beauty, to the stoop of condescension, to the tear of pity, to the welcome of sweetest love. So hath God ministered to us in His Book and in the bounty of His providence. I was never with Him in the great mystery which He wrought out behind the screen—the great mystery of growth, germination, progress towards completeness of life; but I have been permitted sometimes to go through the gate with Him almost visibly and hand in hand as He has pointed out to me the blade coming up. But I want to see deeper than that. No, not deeper than that; you begin with the blade and with the ear and with the full corn in the ear; as for that mysterious fibrous root, it is clinging to

the breasts of God. Enough that I may eat a morsel of bread at my Father's table. A right beautiful thing in its young greenness is even the blade, and almost a jewel is the golden grain.

How is the Church represented in the book of Revelation? A bride, beautiful, "adorned for her husband." But why waste time on the "adorned"? The adorning is in the first prophecy, the earliest forecast of the great and holy issue. Are we striving after beauty of character, fineness of soul? Saith the apostle, "Be not weary in welldoing." That is a command; it is disciplinary, it is almost threatening: might it not have been spoken under the lash of the driver? If we have so read it we have misread it. "Be not weary in courtesy"—is that the right reading? Yes, it is. Be not weary in civility; be not weary in civilisation, getting everything to a fine surface and to a gleaming polish. And the great Master of the apostle said the same thing in another direction. Paul says, "Be not weary in civility and courtesy and good manners"; Christ said, "Be not weary in forgiveness." "Lord, I have not been weary in forgiveness; I have forgiven my brother seven times—I am almost weary of it." Christ said, "I say not unto thee, Forgive him seven times, but seventy times seven"—keep on polishing, and never spare the process until it at least approaches completeness. Thus we are warned, and thus we are exhorted and comforted and rewarded. We have to do all things finely, beautifully.

But would not the text have read quite as well it it had stopped at saying, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee?" It would not have been just the same. There is a ministry of detail. You go to receive some kindnesses, and you feel that they have been studied; they are not mere off-hand kindnesses. That little flower that lies next to your plate was put there on purpose. Who put it there? A gentle soul that heard you ten years ago say that you were fond of that flower. It has not been forgotten; and now the chance has come, there is the flower. May I not reject such eloquence! may I be no blind man when I set me down before beauty so ideal and poetic! Yet

this is what God is doing to us in His various providence every day. He is making things on purpose for you, as if you were the only man He had to think of night and day. You say of some preaching, "That sermon was made for me." It was not, in any literal and intentional sense, made for one special man, but it is so full of sympathy, so soft with tears, and there is about it a weird cadence that works its way into the soul, until the soul says, "I have lived for this day, and now the light thereof is round about me." Oh, sad is he, and a poor soul altogether and not worth caring for, who takes anything as a matter of mere course. Some people see nothing, they are blind, whilst they are gazing at you with vacant eyes; they do not see you, they would not know you again under other circumstances, they only know you in certain relations and places. And how bountiful is God to the man who sees Him in all the ways of life! We should see more of God if we looked more for Him. We never see God other than in beauty; there is no roughness or crudeness in God. His robe is made of living jewels.

Now what about the beauty of our own character? Do we study religious culture? There might have been another flower there; this might have been cared for with daintier solicitude; that is out of square; if you put that flower in that vase just in the true geometry, the house would be a new house. But there are those people in life who do things slovenly, off-handedly, and are anxious to get them all over, and be done with them. That is poor living. There are others who could not go into a wayside cottage without making it just as big and beautiful as the great house over the hill, only on a smaller scale. I would not be the people in the big house over the hill who keep all the flowers in a greenhouse; I want them on the table, I want them to help my life, I want them to be the best part of the food, because food for the soul. Is this the line of our own life-house? There are two ways of answering a child: there is a way of answering the child which the child will so take to heart that it will never see you again if it can possibly help it; and there is another way of speaking to the child by which you write your name on the heart of

the child, and in twenty years the writing will just be as vivid as it was at first. Oh for this finer culture! On the other hand, we have to beware lest we work in veneer, rather than in solid oak and solid mahogany or walnut. Do not imagine that beauty can be put on in any spiritual sense. In the spiritual sense beauty is a miracle of the Holy Ghost; the inner work of the soul is wrought out in exquisiteness by the Holy Spirit—the beautiful Dove, the emblem of peace and love.

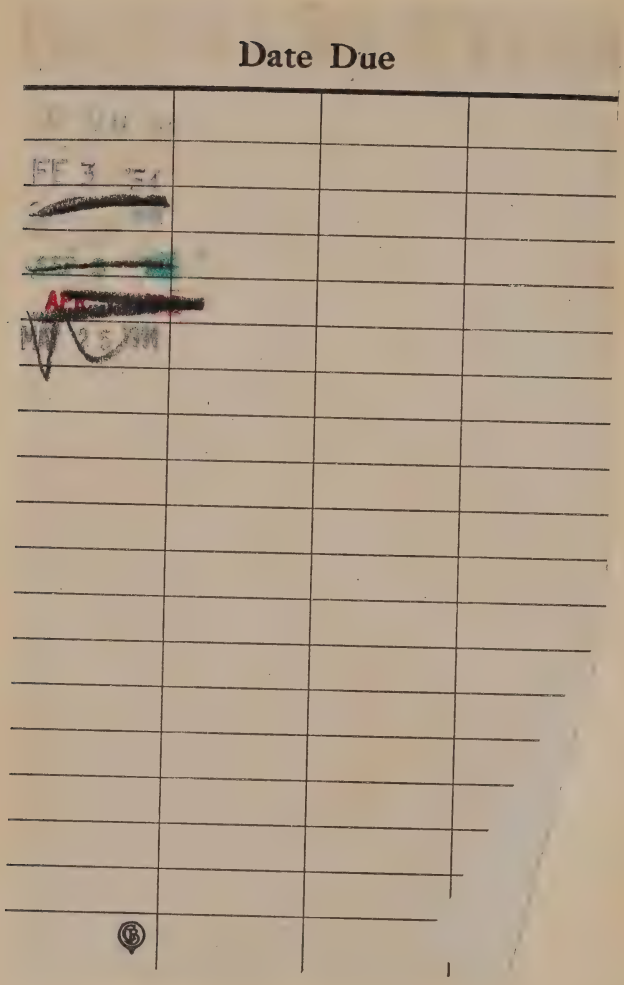
We are then at two different points in our lives, it may be. Here is the man who has not begun to repent, live yet; then we have to say to him, Repent. And here is a man who has been toiling and praying, and serving and suffering for ten years, and we have to say to him, Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ; I am persuaded that He that hath begun a good work in you will continue it until the day of Christ. Take heart, try again; it is for the King you are working; and if you wish to be a vessel meet for the Master's use, go on polishing, working, praying, and keep your hope alive: for we are saved by hope.

It is thirty-two years to-day you and I came together in the relation of fellow suppliants and fellow students; it is our thirty-second year completed. Taking all these thirty-two years, who can interpret all their meaning or encompass all their influence? It is to me startling to hear a man again and again say, as I am accustomed to hear it said, "I heard your first sermon in London on a Thursday morning." He speaks of it as something wonderful, as if it were long, long ago. Preaching every Thursday morning in the City of London, I do not feel the lapse of time, but he feels it, because he might have been away years together, and only returned to renew his companionship and to recall faded reminiscences. "I heard you preach your first sermon on a Thursday morning." There are friends about me who have been with me practically every day of the thirty-two years. I have been going out and coming in amongst them for more than a generation, and we are greater

friends than ever to-day. Surely this is the Lord's work, and not the poor service of man. Let us treasure these memories of prayer and study; they may help us some day when the valley is very deep and dark. But I will take the brighter view, and think of the song, the psalm, the anthem, the uplifting prayer, the illuminating exposition, all of which have been granted to us by the Head of the Church. So I will invite you after thirty-two years, to stand up and sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

Benediction.

May grace, mercy, peace, the triune blessing of the triune God, keep our hearts and minds, and give us good courage for the years yet to come. Amen.



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